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Most Women . . .

by

ALEC WAUGH

With Woodcuts by LYND WARD

"Cœlum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt"

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396

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To

ELINOR SHERWIN

for a great many reasons

79077

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MOST WOMEN . . .

WEST INDIAN

I

LDRED CURWEN and myself are, I suppose, as typically nglish as any two men could be. Which is the reason obably, why we spend half our lives out of England, avel to French Islands by French ships and on the jour- y scrupulously avoid our fellow countrymen.

"We must move cautiously," said Eldred, "very cau- ously," as the Cornish Riviera Express rattled us through merset towards a six months' tour of the West Indies. On the tug that awaited us at Plymouth we eyed our llow passengers suspiciously. There were not many of . Two dozen at the most, of whom the half probably ere second class. It was at Bordeaux that the majority passengers joined the ship. They would be French for e greater part, bound for Guadeloupe and Martinique; th a few Spaniards for Caracas and Carthagena and a

smattering of English and American tourists making th round trip of the Caribbean. Trinidad was the only Bri ish island that we should call at. And Trinidad is cosm politan. There are few races of the world that you w not find traces of in the wide straight streets of Port Spain. The signs over the shops are Indian, Spanis French. The history of many peoples has lingered ther You leave England behind you when a French liner sa through the mouthway of the Garonne.

Bordeaux was thirty-six hours away, however, and our side as the little tug puffed its way towards the an chored liner, an unmistakably English couple was di cussing the tall handsome well-dressed man who was loun ing against the bulwark in the bows.

"I wonder," the woman was saying, "whether they put him at our table."

"If they do I'll jolly well complain to the commissaire, her husband answered. "Man's a dago."

"Oh, John, that's what you say about every one who at all good looking."

Her husband smiled patronisingly.

"There's not much chance of making a mistake abou this one. Trust me to spot a nigger when I see one. Wha would you say, Mr. Forrest?" he added, turning to a larg florid, genially middle-aged and prosperous-looking perso

He was answered in an American accent.

"What would I say, Mr. Valence? If you were to as me I'ld say seventy-five per cent poor white and the re tarred rubbish. If you were to ask him, of course, he'l swear to being Portuguese. They're all ashamed of wha they are."

The woman made no reply. But her eyes lingered upon
lounging figure in the bows.
could imagine what she was thinking. Tall, well built,
l groomed, with dark waveless hair, an olive-tinted
n and open features, he was one of the most strikingly
dsome men that I had ever seen. And there was in the
guid droop of his broad shoulders a rather breathless
se of conscious but unassertive superiority. It was easy
guess how deep and instantaneous would be his appeal
one unaccustomed to the exotic. And the life of the
man who stood gazing at him had been, I fancied,
e touched by glamour.
he was young; in the early twenties; and prettyish in
unfinished, unawakened kind of way. The range of
travelling had been small. The dressing case by her
was old, but little labelled. And I could not help
ndering whether it had not been in the main a longing
colour that had led her into marriage. For the man
had talked so domineeringly was not the type with
om a young girl would be likely to fall in love. In the
dle thirties, a little stout, a little bald, with a com-
ion that the tropics had drained of colour, he had no
arent suppleness of mind to take the place of youth
looks. He was considerate, and no doubt affectionate,
a young and pleasantly attractive girl would scarcely
e accepted him if marriage to him had not meant such
nite advantages as the break with a home life that had
d her, or a visiting of the far places in which her
ms had dwelt. And I could imagine the irritation
must be feeling at her husband's aggressive intolerance
verything that was not English: an intolerance that

stood so fair a chance of ruining her trip for her. As t
tug limped its way towards the liner, her eyes kept turni
closely but covertly towards the bows.

§

The first moments of any voyage are apt to be co
fused. Certainly the first of this one were. The lugga
had been stacked in a pile on the lower deck and each
the passengers was under the impression that he had lo
or was in danger of losing everything.

"There you see, my most important suitcase lost,"
fretful military-looking Englishman was complaining
a harassed spouse. "I knew what it would be. I kno
what foreigners are like. But you insisted on coming
a French ship. Now we're without any of our letters
introduction. We might just as well have stayed behind

"Dear, isn't that your suitcase there?"

"Where?"

"Behind that coil of rope."

"Which one? That? Yes, so it is. And what a ridicu
lous place to put it. Who ever heard of putting a suitca
behind a coil of rope. Hi, steward, hi!"

The American who had been addressed as Mr. Forre
was characteristically exuberant and characteristically suc
cessful. Of the available stewards he promptly commar
deered four.

"Now, that's mine and that and that and that. Th
sooner it's all in my cabin the sooner you'll all be tipped.

Mr. Valence on the other hand made a quick and punc
tilious examination of the scattered heap of trunks an

itcases, discovered and mentally registered the position
each article, then went in search of his cabin steward.
Alone of that querulous, impatient group the dark
ranger took no interest in the proceedings. He tapped
e first steward that he saw upon the shoulder.

"These are my baggage checks," he said, and his French
as extremely pure. "There are five pieces. They are
l labelled. Ronato's my name. Conrad Ronato."

He did not wait to see the collection of his luggage.
ith a smooth, flowing stride and with Mrs. Valence's
es following him, he strolled towards the upper deck.

§

The first day of a long voyage is one usually of rest,
packing and letter writing. It is not till the third or
urth day out that one begins to realise who is on the
ip. Except for meals, and our morning and evening
alk, we had scarcely left our cabin before the ship was
rthed, the gangway down, and we were leaning over
e taffrail on the upper deck taking snapshots of the
ay.

The Valences were practically the first to go on shore.
though the sea had been reasonably calm, she looked
ail and weak. So weak, indeed, that on the bottom rung
e stumbled and but for her husband's presence at her
e would have fallen.

At the foot of the gangway there was a group of cargo-
en; Lascars, half of them. And as she flung her arm
und her husband's neck to support herself, one of them
ssed a remark over his shoulder to his companions. From

the whole group there went up a coarse offensive laugh She flushed. There could be no doubt that the laugh wa at her expense. Her husband hesitated. The Lascar wh had made the remark was staring back at him with the in solence that the underdog assumes when he finds himsel in a superior position. There was not a gendarme, not a official within sight. It was an awkward situation. Va lence did not take long to make up his mind.

"Come on," he said, "the sooner we're out of this th better."

And stepping quickly on to the quay, he held out hi hand to his wife to help her down. As he did so from th gangway at his back there came the sudden sound of a voice snapped furiously.

"You there, what in hell's name do you think you're doing?"

Looking down, we saw the imposing figure of Conrad Ronato.

Without pausing to speak to Mrs. Valence, he strod past her on to the quay, up to the group of cargomen, and straight to the low-tongued Lascar. He made no attempt at violence; he did not clench his fists; he just stood there his hands on his hips, looking the Lascar slowly up and down. Under that cold glance the Lascar for all that he was as broad as Ronato and as tall, appeared to grow squat short, insignificant. For a full half minute Ronato stood there.

"You scum, you filthy scum," he said at length, and his voice was cold, cruel and contemptuous. "Get away from here. Right away. Out of my sight. Go!"

The Lascar did not even attempt a protest. Sheepishly

: turned away. At the corner of the docks he paused, oking back to see if Ronato were still there.

"Get along: right away!" Ronato shouted. He did not ove till the man was out of sight, then without a glance the group of cargomen he swung round and lifting his t, bowed to Mrs. Valence. He did not smile, but his es, his bright dark eyes looked very straightly into hers, fore he turned to walk on into the town.

Irresolute and in silence Valence and his wife stood at e bottom of the gangway.

Then lamely, querulously, but loudly so as to give an pearance of strength, Valence began an indirect defence his behaviour.

"That was needless," he said. "Far better to do noth- g in a case like that. When a nigger's unruly, just ig- re him. Just as in the army an officer ought never to eak to a drunken soldier. It only means trouble. One ually comes off worst. And even if one doesn't, sooner later the man's friends get even with you. We had a se of that two years ago in Port of Spain. Tell you out it some time. Never does to start a row. Always ep out of one, that's my motto. More dignified in the ng run."

Leaning over the taffrail we heard every word. "He'ld ve done far better to have kept quiet," Eldred said.

I nodded. There had been no need for Valence to de- nd himself. He would have only made himself ridicu- us and his wife too, by exchanging backchat with a owd of niggers. She would not blame him in the least. obably she had scarcely bothered to consider the part had played in the incident. With thrilled breath she

was remembering the imperious carriage of those broa shoulders, the snapped contemptuous order, the gleamin fire in those bold, bright eyes.

§

That, for four days, was the last we saw of them. Fo forty hours the boat remained anchored in Bordeaux. An there are few cities where forty hours can be spent mor pleasantly. If Paris has better restaurants than the Chapo Fin and the Chapeau Rouge, I do not know them. I shal long remember the *bécasse flambé* of our last western din ner; the bottle of Cheval Blanc which the head waiter pon tifically recommended and the soft rich brandy over whic we sat long after the curtain had risen at the Opera whose bouquet still lingered upon my palate as I lolle back in that pleasantly rococo hall, listening drowsily t Thaïs's wailingly reiterated "eternellement"; remember ing the argument I had had with a surly Russian in Ta hiti who refused to admit "pour toujours" as a translatio of "forever." As he had earlier in the evening insisted tha there were professionals in English Rugger and that Dos toieffsky and Turgenev were not contemporaries, I as sumed that he must be wrong also about "eternellement." The party generally, however, preferred his rendering, s I handed over my hundred francs and waited patientl till I could convince him about football and Turgenev Which I never did, since a few weeks later he went on cruise round the Paumotus in a smallish schooner in th typhoon season.

And after that was Biscay; a savage and a bitter Biscay

vith gramophone records and shoes and trunks slithering ackwards and forwards across the cabin floor. It was wo days before we could face the open with any confi- ence, and three before I found in the deck chair next o mine a limp, white-cheeked but forlornly appealing Irs. Valence.

Her husband was on the other side of her. He had not een seasick, he informed us, but the skin of his face was ightened by the cold, giving him an unhealthy look. he conversation was desultory.

"I think," said Mrs. Valence finally, "that it would be ice if you asked Mr. Ronato to take a cocktail with us his evening."

"Mr. Ronato! Who's he?"

"The man who ordered away that negro at Bordeaux."

Valence pursed his lips together.

"So that's his name, is it? He would call himself some- hing Spanish. Ask him to take a cocktail with us? I'ld nuch rather not. He's coloured, you know. And it vould be a bit awkward if he were going to Trinidad."

"He isn't. He's going to Puerto Colombia."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw it on his chair."

"You seem to have found out a good deal about him."

"What have I found out?"

"His name, and where he's going."

"One's naturally curious about some one who's been ice to one."

"I suppose so. Still . . . oh, well, I'll ask him if you ke."

The consent was given grudgingly. But the invitation could not have been made more affably.

As Ronato came along the deck with a smooth easy stride, Valence rose from his chair and went across to him.

"I don't think one needs introductions on a boat?" he said. "I hope you'll be informal enough to take a cocktail with us before dinner?"

It was said charmingly. Whatever Valence might have thought personally about the man, he was not the type as long as relations remained cordial to be anything but a courteous host. And it was impossible to help remarking that Ronato's acceptance was made less graciously than the invitation had been. I wondered how it would turn out. And since I had been included in the invitation I looked forward to the evening with some eagerness.

It turned out well enough. Eldred and Forrest joined us and we discussed the kinds of thing that one does discuss at a first meeting on board a liner; the food, the accommodation, the other passengers, the countries that we were bound for. The talk flowed smoothly and superficially. No reference was made, however, to the incident upon the docks. In the end it was left to Mrs. Valence herself to make it, just as we were rising from the table.

"We've been sitting here all this time," she said, "and I've not even as much as said thank you to Mr. Ronato for his courtesy to me on the docks the other day."

Ronato shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that," he said. "That was nothing. It needs a lesson now and again, that canaille."

"It's nice of you to put it that way, but I was very grateful."

Her husband flashed a quick, irritated look at her.
"Was that necessary?" he asked, as we walked down to ner.
"I thought it was."
Valence shrugged his shoulders.
"Perhaps you're right. At any rate, it'll show you what d of fellows these half-castes are. You heard the way talked about those niggers: that's the way coloured ple always do talk. Trying to make out that it's not at they are themselves."
he made no attempt to champion him. As likely as her husband was right, she must have thought. He lived in the tropics for ten years after all. But even t must have been hard for her to believe that the man to realise for her a young girl's dream of chivalry no more than a quarter-caste pretending to be a Span-, covering his traces with abuse of the roots that he sprung from.

§

On the following evening as we sat, this time as El-d's guests, over cocktails, she deliberately arranged the versation so that she should have a chance of seeing ther they were right.
We were talking of the West Indies: of their past, their blems, their uncertain future.
"They say," she remarked, "that half the trouble lies he fact that the negroes can't be made to work. Have heard that, Mr. Ronato?"
"Of course I have. It's common knowledge. What you expect with the way they're treated?"

"How are they being treated?"

"Far too well. There's only one way to treat the people: that's rough."

He spoke forcefully, contemptuously. And a frow flickered across her face. She could imagine the thin that her husband and Mr. Forrest would be saying afte wards. She did not, however, abandon her attempt.

"You think you'ld get better work out of them th way?" she asked.

Ronato smiled: a knowing, but not unpleasant smile.

"There's no other way," he said. "A hundred yea ago my great-grandfather built himself a palace. O day he found a number of workmen loitering idly rou a block of stone. 'What is the meaning of this?' he aske The stone was too heavy, he was told. It could not carried to the mountain top. 'Very well,' my grea grandfather said, 'line up there.' Then, turning to bodyguard he said: 'Shoot every fourth man. Perhap he remarked afterwards to the survivors, 'you will fe stronger now.' Next morning the stone was in its place

The story was told quietly, with an absence of stre that accentuated its drama.[1] As it reached its climax Fo rest gave a start.

"Where was that palace?"

"At Sans Souci."

"Your great-grandfather was Henri Christophe, then

Ronato nodded his head.

"He had many sons. My grandfather was one of them

[1] This story has been widely told and generally believed. There is however historical support for it. John Vandercook maintains that it is out of keep with Christophe's character. Waste was abhorrent to Christophe. He would have wasted man-power.

The moment Ronato left us, Mrs. Valence turned eagerly to Forrest.

"Who was Henri Christophe? I've never heard of him."

"A great many people haven't," he replied. "Yet he's as romantic a figure as Nero and Caligula. Henri Christophe was Emperor of Haiti, the Black Republic. He tried to out-Europe Europe, and he built at the top of a mountain, no man knows how, a palace that's comparable with the Acropolis."

Mrs. Valence gasped. She knew now whence came that imperious bearing, that intolerant contempt. Challengingly she turned towards her husband.

"Well, anyhow there's one coloured man who's not afraid of owning to what he is."

Valence made a clicking noise with his tongue against his teeth.

"Some people are clever enough to know that the best way of avoiding criticism is to invite it."

"Oh, John!" Then, after a pause, "That's quibbling. Anyhow, in a case like this, when he's got a great-grandfather like that. What do you think, Mr. Forrest?"

The American shook his head.

"I guess, Mrs. Valence, that I'm too much of a southerner and have spent too much of my life in the States to be unbiassed on a point of this kind. But, well, I'll put it this way. I've known quite a few damned fine coloured people in my time. Maybe this fellow's one of them."

That night for the first time the sea was calm enough for dancing. As Mrs. Valence waltzed with her husband, one of those prosaic, uninspired dancers who give a woman the impression that she is dancing by herself, her eyes kept

turning towards Ronato. Would he ask her for a dance wondered? And were he to, what action would her husband take?

It was a question that was very rapidly to be answered. At the beginning of the next foxtrot Ronato came across to her. He did not speak; he just bent forward, gracefully. Imploringly, as though she were asking mercy of him she looked up at him. Then, still with no words spoken, rose.

Mentally I raised my eyebrows. If this wasn't the start of something, I didn't know what was. Seated at her husband's side I watched them.

Slowly, forcefully, with long even strides Ronato carried her into the rhythm of the dance. He was a straight forward dancer, with few intricacies of step, but the pulse of the music vibrated through every movement of his feet and shoulders, as through Western feet and shoulders never can, so that his partner had the sensation of sinking into, of becoming a part of, that syncopation. It was a complete surrender of her personality; yet that surrender made her feel more complete than she had ever been before. Her knees felt weak when at the dance's end, with the support of that arm taken from her shoulder, she was led back to her chair beside her husband.

Valence rose affably to greet them. Without looking at his wife he addressed himself to her partner.

"Mr. Forrest was telling us some most interesting things about Haiti. Have you ever been there yourself?"

Ronato shook his head.

"In the old days I was too young. And now, with the white protectorate, I shouldn't want to. The old Haiti

hed. It's as well perhaps. From the beginning it was doomed. It could never have been anything but a ture of red tragedy and comic opera. It was a brave ving, though."

or a few moments they discussed the strange fortunes hat strange country. Then the music for the next ce began. Ronato rose, bowed, and moved away. ence turned towards his wife.

It's hot in here," he said. "Let's go for a walk out-"

was bleak on deck. It was raining and there was a wind blowing. She shivered. "Darling, let's go back. miserable out here."

If you like you can. I want exercise."

He spoke so abruptly that she started.

John, what's the matter?"

What do you imagine?"

I can't imagine."

Don't be ridiculous. Of course you can. How did expect me to feel after seeing you dancing with that ger?"

Silly one!" Affectionately she put a conciliatory hand n his elbow. He shook it off.

I'm not being silly. Whites have to maintain their ity in the tropics. What do you expect all these peo- to think, seeing you behave like that?"

If they're so foolish as to let that worry them, does it ch matter what they think?"

Whether they're foolish or not, you can't afford to re the opinion of the people you live among."

He shrugged her shoulders. That old argument. What

people thought: the argument that right through h childhood and her youth had harassed her. She answer him in the same words, in the same tone, in the same ter per that she had answered her school-mistresses and paren

"I'm sorry, John."

Her submission pacified him.

"Oh, well," he said, "it can't be helped. You can't expected to realise all these things right away. I do suppose it matters just that once."

§

That was the conversation that I pictured. But it m not, of course, have been anything like that.

On questions of actual fact no witness can be more u reliable than the novelist. In the same way that a math matician will resolve at a glance into a simple equation long and complicated row of figures: that a chess play will accept the inevitability of defeat when to the uninit ated the game would appear to be in an early and und veloped stage: that a scholar will extract from a pile unsorted documents the one sentence that he needs to d fend a thesis: in that same way the novelist, since that his job, his talent, will recognise quickly the essentials a setting and the potentialities of a situation. But th very foreknowledge of what might happen, mingled wi his capacity and his instinct to transport the shadowy ar half-glimpsed-at figures of real life into the concrete wor of his imagination and create there for them the situatio by which they can be explained and realised, make him unsure witness as to what actually does take place.

saw clearly enough the framework of the triangle; nce, decent, honourable, well-intentioned but preju- l, unromantic, settled in his ideas; his wife, young, perienced, emotionally unaroused by marriage; drawn stibly by glamour; Ronato, unscrupulously conscious s power, with the quarter-caste's need for self-asser-

I knew how that situation might develop. From evidence of chance attitudes and glances; of an at- here impalpable but real I know how I believe it did lop. On my oath in a court of law I could only make nswer. But this is the story as I saw it.

§

next night the wind had dropped. It was warm, a baby moon waxing goldenly across the bows.

t's heavenly," said Valence. "Let's go and sit on the deck."

After we've danced," she said.

e looked at her suspiciously.

Won't it be a little difficult for you if Ronato asks to dance with him?"

Why should it be?"

t'll mean making an excuse."

erhaps I'll not be wanting to."

was said laughingly. She had made up her mind that s better to accept her husband's prejudices, however d they might appear. One had to be loyal to one's nd, and if one lived in a place it was more comfort- to conform, outwardly at any rate, to recognised on.

Her husband, however, not seeing the sideway glan that would have explained it, missed her mood.

"It doesn't matter whether you want to or whether y don't."

"Why not?"

"Because I forbid you to."

"And suppose I choose to . . . ?"

There was a dangerous look now in her eyes. If th was the way he was going to treat her . . .

They were passing close by the saloon. Through t open windows came the sound of music. Down the de Ronato was strolling lazily. He came up to them with smile and with a bow.

"Will you allow me the pleasure of this dance?" asked.

Mrs. Valence looked challengingly at her husband. H she seen there at that moment one sign of weakness, affectionate pleading, an asking "for my sake don't this thing," she would have shaken her head, contrivi an excuse. But in her husband's face was nothing b that look of dominance, the look that ordered, "I forbid It hardened and it dared her. "Oh, very well," s thought. If that was his attitude let him try it. Let hi try to stop her. Let him with his hatred of being co spicuous, make a scene on deck before all these peop Let him learn, since he had sought the lesson, that it w dangerous to threaten an authority you could not exert.

Defiantly she turned towards Ronato.

"Thank you," she said. "I'll love to."

She danced as she had never danced before, vividly,

e pride of her self-vindication. There was a puzzled, estioning look in Ronato's eyes as the dance ended.

"I will take you to your husband," he said shortly.

But though they walked right round the deck and looked o the smoking room, they could not find him.

"Perhaps he's on the boat deck."

He was not, however.

Ronato smiled. "Oh, well, since he's not, and since it o lovely here, shall we stay a little? I am not sorry. I not think your husband likes me."

She would have liked to tell him that her husband had bidden her to dance with him. But loyalty prevented .

"He's never said anything to me," she answered.

"He doesn't, though. I can tell that. He wouldn't. at type of man and mine have nothing in common h each other. While you . . ." He paused, looking y straightly at her through the moon-silvered dusk. cannot understand you, you English women. How you, nking as you do, should tie yourself to a man like that, calm, so self-assured, so measured, so incapable—how t to be said?—of revealing you to yourself. You, who re so made for loving."

He had drawn very close to her as he spoke. On the frail his little finger had hooked itself over hers. She ed to draw her hand away, but could not.

"You mustn't," she protested. "I'm married. You stn't talk like that." Thinking, as she protested: "With finger he is capable of holding my whole hand."

He laughed at the word marriage.

"Marriage," he said, "that's not a word that's ever mean very much to me or mine. My great-grandmother wa sitting on the doorstep of her cabin mending a net whe my great-grandfather drove through her village. She wa fourteen and she had known no man. I have seen a pic ture of her; she was very lovely. My great-grandfathe paused before her cabin. 'The woman pleases me,' he sai to his bodyguard, 'bring her after me.' My father was i a train on his way through Mexico when he saw m mother. She was tying back a rosebush in her garden. A the next station my father left his carriage and went back Marriage has never meant much to the men of my family We have taken the things we've wanted. At first sigh we have known the things we wanted. As I knew whe I set eyes on you."

His voice was strong and wooing, soft and purposeful No one had ever spoken to her like that before. Th young men whose fingers had brushed hers at dances whose eyes had sought hers timidly in the hope of readin there encouragement of their enterprise; the slow, haltin phrases with which her husband had asked her to marr him, how far removed they were from these glowin words.

"From the moment I met you, from the first time I saw you on that tug, from the first time I heard your voice, I knew we belonged to one another: that you were mine t come with me when I called, as you are going to when I call."

Glowing, intoxicating words: words that had never been spoken to her: the words that she, whose heart loved colour, had so longed to hear, had so despaired of hearing

r blood beat hotly, her knees were weak with longing. "No, no!" she cried. "No. No! Oh, my dear, how uld I?"

§

For the remainder of the voyage she was two selves. here was the self who slept and bathed and dressed and and played deck games. The self who sat at table tween her husband and Mr. Forrest, who bought tickets the daily pool, who exchanged shipboard gossip with e other passengers, who was friendly and affectionate th her husband; more than ordinarily friendly and affectionate out of a feeling of compensating justice. There s that self; the ordinary, calm-blooded self; and there as the other; the strange, ecstatic, reckless self who between dances eagerly listened on the upper deck under e moon's cooling silver, timidly responsive, to the hot otestation of Ronato's passion.

"What's happening to me?" she thought. "What am I ing? Where am I bound?"

Only two months back she had been standing at the ar at her husband's side promising that for the rest of eir lives, for better, for worse, she would obey him and nour him. And now, here she was planning heaven ew what madness, with this stranger.

"There are innumerable boats sailing from Martinique," said. "We'll find one going somewhere, to Cayenne Cuba or Guadeloupe. Does it matter where, as long as 're together? It'll be so easy. I'll find out as soon as we rive. Before any one knows what's happening we shall away."

She had shaken her head. "No, no," she had said, "won't, I can't!"

But even as she had protested, she had known she would Here was something that had never come into her lif before, that probably would never come again, that sh could not afford to say good-bye to. No doubt she woul be treating John disgracefully. He had been good to her He had done nothing to deserve such treatment. And ye was she altogether to blame, she asked herself. Was it he fault that John had left so much of her untouched, ope to another man's assault? If John had made her com pletely his, nothing of this could have happened. Ha people a right to more than they could take and hold Had they? She didn't know. She only knew that thi was one of those impulses against which honour, loyalty duty were cardboard armour.

And the days passed, bringing her closer to Martinique

§

But all that, as I said, is purely guesswork. Things ma not have gone at all that way. Whatever way they wer going, however, it was very clear that the situation ha begun to worry Forrest.

On the evening before we reached Martinique Eldre and I found ourselves alone with him.

"I'm worried about that little woman," he said. "Ther may be nothing to it, of course. But it's far more likel that there is. I don't care about her husband much. He' a stiff kind of guy. But I like her and I don't want he to make a fool of herself; not with that kind of creature

how. You'll say I'm prejudiced about colour. You'll why a man should be any worse because his ancestors e lived for centuries under the sun. We were all much a muchness once, you'll argue. But it's two thousand rs since we were be-woaded Britons. And that's a long y back. It's not a hundred years since the nigger was a ve. Which is what you people in London just won't lize. You see now and again an educated, cultured, rming negro. You take him at your standard and you that we Americans are absurd to have colour prejudice. t what you haven't seen is the negro in his primitive te. You don't say to yourselves as we do: 'This may all very fine, but fifty years back, boy, it wasn't ite so good!' We can't forget what a little way back is."

He paused pensively. "I'ld rather like that young man to see what the negro's like in his actual state."

§

We berthed early on the following morning.

From the taffrail of the upper deck Mrs. Valence looked wn with wondering eyes on to the noise and colour and imation of her first real tropic port. At Guadeloupe had anchored in the bay. Pointe-à-Pitre was moreover attered be-cycloned wreck.

"Well, is it what you expected?" Forrest asked her.

She shook her head. No place is quite what one expects. e did not know exactly what it was that she had looked . But this black, sun-baked stretch of ground with its tor cars, its sheds, its offices, its stacks of coal, its bright

colours, its gesticulating crowd was at the same time mo commonplace and more barbaric than she had expected.

"Most coast towns look much the same," said Forres "There's only one really distinctive thing about Fort-d France; I wonder if you've noticed it. It's the wome and not the men who do the coaling."

She had not noticed. She had done little more tha glance at the soot-covered figures who were scurrying lik ants with baskets on their heads from the ship to the pi of coal. But looking more closely she saw that they wer every one of them, women.

"They carry those baskets," Forrest told her, "at fiv sous a time, while their husbands stay in the districts an drink rum. It's the nigger's idea of what a woman's pos tion should be. It's interesting. But there'll be more in teresting things to see before you go. It's Saturday, whic is a bit of luck. You'll be able to see the Bal Lou-Lou We'll go for a drive first. You'ld like that, wouldn't you?

"I'ld love it."

It was a restless journey. The car was ill-sprung. Th road was bumpy. It was very hot. The back seat ha not been constructed for the three of us who were jamme together in it, and the last characteristic of Forrest's com pany was reposefulness. As the car rattled, to the inces sant honking of the chauffeur's horn, along the shade road from the docks towards the town, past the Savan with its palm-guarded statue, through the hot, cobble streets of Fort-de-France into the clear, green countryside, he did not for one instant cease to chatter.

"Now, look," he said, "look well. What's your first impression of this place? Gaiety. French gaiety and sun-

ht. But look closely, once you're out of the town, once u're past the cafés, look closely into those people's faces you pass them. Do you see gaiety there? I don't. rliness, arrogance, suspicion, but not gaiety. Look at t group there, on your right."

We looked. Ten or twelve island girls were coming vards us along the road. They carried baskets on their ds. Their chatter in the harsh native Creole gave the pression that they were quarrelling. As the car passed y looked at us with sullen, inexpressive faces.

"If this had been Tahiti they'ld have been laughing and ging," said Forrest. "They'ld have waved their hands us."

"I'd always thought of them as a happy people," said s. Valence.

"In Africa they may be. But they're exiles here. Which vhat you must remember of every negro that we whites et. They're exiles, the descendants of slaves, with the ve mentality; the mentality of liberated slaves. Look, e's one of their villages. Let's stop the car and stroll ough it."

At first sight it was the tropical village of one's dreams. stood on the edge of a path, with a clear stream running ough it. Half-naked children were playing in front their cabins, throwing tops; girls chattered to one an- er; a group of men were huddled about a game of nce that they played with a board and numbers. There re fishermen working on their nets. And yet instead of ighting, it disgusted. You saw instead of a happy, efree people living in touch with nature, stupid, un- ndly faces, dirty, airless cabins, grubby bodies, grubbier

clothes, a prevailing atmosphere of squalor. With a shudder Mrs. Valence turned away.

"I can't bear it," she said. "Let's go."

Forrest looked curiously at her. He half opened his mouth to speak, but remained silent. For the rest of the journey he spoke little. For two hours we drove through some of the loveliest landscape in the world. Past palm trees and banana groves, through fields of waving sugar cane; now low by the sea's shore; now high looking over the blue plain of the Caribbean; now on a mid-country road with the rolling miles of greenery stretching to the smoking summit of Mount Pelée. It was lovely beyond the scope of speech. Yet it was easy to see how every succeeding mile deepened for Mrs. Valence the sensation of depression which the first native village had given her. Its squalor marred the surrounding beauty. She could not forget that squalor, every nestling village, every group of natives along the road reminded her of it.

She looked limp and drained of life by the time we were back again in Fort-de-France.

"Well, that's one side of the picture," said Forrest. "You'll see the other to-night at the Bal Lou-Lou."

§

That dance, of which at every port of the seven seas you will hear sailors speak, is to be found only in Martinique.

It has a drama peculiarly its own. There is little to tell you as you walk down the Rue Saint-Renard, that you are going to an exhibition that is without parallel in a

te-run country. You pay your five francs and you
l yourself in a large dance hall no different from many
usand others. It is decorated with flags and paper
amers. There is a balcony round it, with tables and
ouple of bars. It is filled with the kind of people that
would expect to find in an ordinary provincial dance
in the French tropics; coloured people, for the most
, with a fair sprinkling of white men; soldiers and
darmes and young men in business. The music is such
ou would expect in such a place; loud and syncopated;
lent, with a heavily stressed rhythm. It all seems very
inary.

I can't see that there's anything very exceptional about
," said Mrs. Valence.

or half-an-hour she had sat on the balcony looking
n at the revolving couples. It was the kind of thing
she had seen in England at her local Palais de Danse;
there it had been jollier. There had not been the
tinual surliness of these dusky faces.

"There's no real gaiety here," she said.

orrest smiled.

"You wait, it's early yet. It'll be the real thing later on.
the moment it is Africa subjugated by France. Soon
be France subjugated by Africa."

We waited. The room got crowded. The atmosphere
w hot. Every table on the balcony was occupied.
itresses were running backwards and forwards from
bars. There was a good deal of noise, but the char-
ristic of the dance remained unaltered.

"Is it never going to begin?" said Mrs. Valence. "I'm
ing tired."

"A minute or two," said Forrest. "It can't be muc longer now."

At that moment there was the crash of a drum. Fro the next table came a murmur of "Danse du Pays." Ther was a shuffle of chairs, an emptying of the crowded table Then on a loud crash the music started.

It is a dance that you will not see in public in any othe country. The couples dance face to face. The girl clasp her hands behind her partner's neck. He clasps his abou her waist. They dance with a swaying motion, quickl to begin with, but gradually the speed slackens: slacken till they are almost motionless. Clasped close they swa together. With every moment the dance grows tenser.

The music does not grow louder or more fast, it become keener, more vibrant. The clarionette wails piercingly It is half a moan, it is half a cry. The rhythm in ever swaying body grows more purposeful; its symbolism mor defined.

Half frightened, half fascinated, Mrs. Valence leant ove the balcony watching it. She gasped as with a wail th music ceased, and the dancers, limp and lax-eyed, fel away from one another.

"Well, what do you make of it?" said Forrest.

"Do they do it again?"

"Oh, yes, in a minute or two."

Her hands clenched tight upon the rail, her breath coming quickly and unevenly, glaring unseeingly in front o her, she waited in a stupor of anticipation till once again came the beating of the drums, till once more below he there were the tight-clasped figures; at moments swaying with hot, concentrated fever, tenser and more abandoned

y, surer of one another; at others, motionless, save for rhythmic tremor that from head to toe kept pace with barbaric music. In a trance she watched it. Then ddenly, with a shiver, she turned away.

"I can't bear it," she said. "Take me out."

I could only guess at the thoughts that lay behind that ed gasp. But it was not, I fancy, the symbolism of the ce, but the self-contained detachment of the dancers mselves that had revolted her; the detachment that de it possible for the dancers to change partners, as ugh it were the dance itself and not the person you ced it with, that counted. In that dance one can read tten clear the denial of everything for which civilisa- n stands.

"Take me back," she said. "I couldn't bear another nute of it!"

Of the psychology of what followed I can only guess. Dazed, unspeaking, she drove back with us to the ship. the deck, pacing irritably up and down was Ronato. blinked at him, as though she were seeing him for the t time. Stared at through distorting eyes, his face med to change before her, as though the nose were tening, the mouth were broadening, the forehead lower- , the colour deepening; as though every drop of white od were being drained out of it, as though nothing but attributes of savagery were left. She raised her hand ore her eyes. Everything she had seen that day: the men with the baskets of coal upon their heads, the sullen es in the street, the squalid villages, the airless cabins; lly the loathesome dance: everything that she had seen ing the last ten hours filled her with hatred and disgust

for the face in front of her, for all that was symbolise and contained in it.

"Go away," she said. "Go away. I hate you. I nev want to look at you again."

It was almost in fright that she ran down the deck t wards her cabin.

Her husband had not gone to bed. Changed in pyjamas, he was sitting on the window sofa reading a d tective story. His face wore a fretful, harassed look.

"Ah, there you are at last. I've been worrying. Whe have you been? You shouldn't go out like that . . . s late, I mean. It looks bad . . . people are bound to thin . . . if they'ld met me in the smoking room, for instanc without you . . . they'd have asked me where you we and if I hadn't known . . . that's why I came down her so that people shouldn't ask. Really it's thoughtles Thoughtless and inconsiderate of you."

She made no answer. She just stood staring at him. H was not one of those men whom pyjamas suit. The stoc size cotton-silk revealed the skinniness of his neck, th swelling of his paunch, the roundness of his shoulders. Hi thinning hair was ruffled where he had leant back agains the wainscoting. His chin was grubby with ninetee hours' growth of beard. Never had he seemed more feeble more ineffectual, less of a man. Her inflamed brain re called the vividness, the force, the brutality of the danc that she had seen that evening. They had been men, any how.

With a shrug of the shoulders she turned away, consciou of the birth pangs in her of a contempt for her husban that would only end with death.

MARTINIQUAISE

II

ey charge you forty francs a day in Martinique, at the el de la Victoire and as that includes in addition to your l as much red wine as you can tackle, you have no t to expect a high standard of luxury. We did expect ugh, Eldred Curwen and myself, something rather er in the way of service than the slatternly half-caste clattered the plates like muskets, upset sardine oil my trousers, and brought no potatoes till we had fin- d our entrée. It was not even as though she had made for her inefficiency, as do so many negroes, by an able readiness to smile. She was sour and ill-favoured. hout being old she looked as though she had never n young. Her features were set in a sulky scowl. long red print frock was soiled and shapeless. re was no pretty handkerchief knotted in her hair.

She was, we decided, just too much of a good thin

"We'll change our table this evening," Eldred said.

We did not expect to meet with any difficulty. A bo was sailing for St. Thomas that afternoon, and the dinir room when we came down to it for dinner was compar tively empty. The maître d'hôtel became flustered, hov ever, when we asked to be placed at another table.

"I have put you at Floria's table," he said.

"I know," we answered. "But we want to l moved from it. There are several tables vacant, aren there?"

He nodded his head. Yes, certainly there were tabl vacant. At the same time . . .

He was still hesitating when Floria shuffled across th room on her bare feet.

"That's your table, there," she said.

"We are arranging to change tables," Eldred told her.

The sullen look on her face darkened. "That's you table," she repeated, "there."

But by this time I had begun to grow impatient. "W can't wait here the whole evening," I said to the maîtr d'hôtel. "Please find us another table. That one ove there is empty, isn't it?"

I had begun to move across to it, when Floria pushed i front of me.

"Why?" she asked.

Her manner was so offensive that my impatience con quered my self-control.

"Because I don't want to have all my trousers covered with sardine oil."

I spoke angrily. And as she heard me the sulky expres

of her features deepened into a stare of fierce malevo-
e. Her eyes followed us as we crossed the room.
t the table next to ours was a French Creole who had
e out on the same boat with us.
That was a black look she gave us," I remarked.
e nodded his head. "It certainly was," he answered,
ing significantly as though there were more that he
ld say. He shrugged his shoulders casually, however.
, well," he said, "it may mean nothing."

§

hat night I could not sleep. I was weary with the ex-
tion of a long sea voyage, of packing, of early rising,
ne excitement of arriving at a new place, but I could
sleep: all night I tossed restlessly under the mosquito
I felt limp and lifeless as I came up from my shower
to the wide verandah on which my morning coffee
fruit were awaiting me, to find that Eldred Curwen,
lly a late riser, was already down. There were red
under his eyes.
How did you sleep?" I asked.
Twice, for three consecutive minutes."
That's more than I managed."
t the other end of the verandah the French Creole who
travelled out with us was dipping a crust of bread into
coffee. He laughed at our admission.
I was wondering about that," he said. "If I were you
ould go back to Floria's table."
We stared at him in surprise.
What are we to take that to mean?" we asked.

"Only that black magic does exist."

We laughed at that. "Are you trying to tell us tha Floria's put a spell on us?"

"More or less."

"And are you expecting us to believe that?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "You can believe it or no believe it, as you choose, but do you fancy the people wh run this hotel would keep a woman like that if they weren afraid of her? Anyhow, wait and see how you sleep to night. It may be that last night you were too excited.

Throughout that day I thought of nothing except sleep As I strolled through the narrow coloured streets of Fort de-France; as I sat on the balcony of the Club sipping rum punch, looking out over the green Savane to th white statue of Josephine; as I drove in the afternoo through green fields of cane to the palm groves of L Fontaine and Carbet, my eyelids ached and throbbed. counted the moments till the sun should have sunk int the Caribbean.

It was only a few minutes after eight that I went t bed, feeling that not for another second could I keep of sleep, but once again I was to toss hot and restless an exhausted through the interminable hours of a tropi night, and once again, when at last dawn came, I found fractious and red-eyed Eldred waiting me on the veran dah.

"Really," he said, "this is too much of a good thing. haven't had two minutes' sleep."

The Frenchman laughed knowingly over his coffee. " should change your table in the dining-room if I wer you," he said.

We were less sceptical now than we had been on the evious evening.

"Has she been poisoning us?" we asked.

He shook his head. "She doesn't need poison, not ma-ial poison anyhow. She's got beyond that. You ouldn't be surprised at the hotel keeping her on here, if u knew her story. He paused; then, seeing that we were ening went on:

She was sixteen, he told us, at the time and in the artinique fashion she was lovely. She was straight d tall and supple. She wore a long, flowing green k robe, a yellow madras about her neck, and a green d yellow handkerchief for her hair. There were rings inging from her ears; the gift of a sailor brother. nd she was proud, as are the women of Martinique who ow their beauty to be famous through the length of ntilles. It is of such a one that he spoke to us, and of an ening when her dark eyes smiled softly through a moon-vered dusk.

"So you were afraid to speak to me. Silly one, there as no need to be," she was whispering to the young enchman at her feet.

Her voice was soft, and her French had that unslurred rity of accent which is for those only to whom it comes a taught language.

From the adjacent flank of the verandah came the sound voices, of a gramophone, of ice rattled against glass. low, many feet below, the gentle waters of the Carib-an were breaking upon the beach. From the encircling ls the murmur of innumerable crickets ebbed and robbed. But for the two young people crouched on the

long flight of steps there existed beneath that velvet sky no sound but their own voices, no beings but themselves.

"And all this time," she went on, "you've been missing me, really and truly missing me?"

"From that first instant, beautiful. Do you remember?"

She nodded her head slowly. "How should I forget?"

That first instant. It had been within an hour of his arrival at Martinique to take up a post there as a minor government official. He was frightened and he was excited. He had never seen the tropics before. He had never left home even. He had never had any responsibility. He was only twenty-one. He was frightened and he was homesick. It was so new, so strange. And yet it was so lovely, the green square with its palm trees and its statue, its flanking of blue sea and shuttered houses. And it was so friendly. He had been welcomed enthusiastically, he had been taken to the Club, had been stood rum punches. He had sat looking down over the balcony, when suddenly in the street below . . .

"There you were," he said, "in that mauve-coloured frock of yours. And you looked up at me. And oh, my dear, for six months I've not been thinking of anything but that."

"Why didn't you tell me, silly?"

"How was I to? I didn't know even who you were."

He had been shy of asking: shy with the inexperience of twenty-one, and with the exaggerated sense of dignity that he felt was due to his position. Even when he had discovered who she was, the daughter of a Frenchman and a native, killed, both of them, in the disaster of Saint

rre, living with cousins in Fort-de-France, supporting self with her needle, he had felt no nearer to meeting . She went out little. He knew none of her friends. ere was no link between them. "It's ridiculous," he told nself as the months went by. "You won't meet her. u'd far better stop thinking about her."

He had not been able to. He could not believe that t look, that had seemed on her side as on his an utter mission of surrender, could be an end as well as a begin- g. For six months the memory of that look had held n back when the moment and the mood had flung in his y the opportunities that inevitably come to a young n, handsome and well-placed.

"No, no," he had thought. "I must keep free. One y I'll be meeting her again. One day all of a sudden l happen."

As it had happened. Never had he felt further from eting her than he had that afternoon as he walked down m his office to the Club. Five o'clock, he had thought. r an hour I'll play bridge or billiards, make or lose some ree or four hundred sous, then it'll be sundown and I'll sitting on the big verandah looking out over the vane. There'll be five or six of us. And we'll discuss e things one does discuss in a place like Fort-de-France: e price of rum, the price of sugar, the rival merits of rious kinds of cars. And we'll go on talking there till en or half-past; till it's time to go back to dinner. And be at the hotel, at my table, by myself, with the ex- aration of the punch subsiding, and I'll be sleepy and a le lonely, and I'll feel that it should be all different, that re should be some other use to make of the early

twenties. I'll be thinking how different *she* could make it for me.

That was how he felt as he had walked down the Rue Perinnon towards the Club. And then, just as he had turned to the right at the street's foot, a voice from a car had hailed him.

"What are you doing? Nothing? Well, come out with us to bathe at Founigaut. Yes, of course you can. There are three carloads of us. Just room for you in this. Jump in."

It was from a man he did not know well, a mulatto of no particular account who directed a small photographic establishment, that the invitation had come. Ordinarily he would have refused it. No sooner, indeed, had he accepted it than he began to wish he hadn't. In no French colony is the colour line drawn strictly. But there were many people in Fort-de-France whom he felt it would be better for him, as an official, not to know. "What am I doing here?" he thought, as the car with its load of shrieking, laughing half-castes rattled round the sharp corners of the uneven, mounting road; as he stood, nervous and silent, trying not to look superior, on the fringe of the chatting crowd that were splashing about the water's edge. He felt embarrassed, self-conscious, out of place. "What am I doing here," he thought, "among these people?"

And then suddenly he saw her. And instantly he was unconscious of the silly noisy crowd. The slim erect figure, the black eyes, the sleek skin whose dark colouring betrayed its origin. "You," he whispered. And the dark eyes smiled and she stretched out her hand to him. "Let's swim," she said. They ran into the water, to swim side

by side with slow even strokes as the sun, red and largening, sank into the Caribbean, and the first stars in the violet sky behind the hills began to glimmer. They said nothing: there was no need for words. Not yet. It was enough, after these months, to be together. In silence they swam back to shore, followed the rest of the party to the bungalow on whose verandah a gramophone was playing. In silence at the head of the long flight of steps they turned into each other's arms to dance. And it was as though all their lives they had danced together. It was an utter harmony, so that afterwards with the record finished, when they walked away to sit side by side on the verandah steps, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that he who was so nervous, should without nervousness speak to her of all the things he had thought and felt during those dividing months.

"All these weeks I've been longing for you. I can't really believe," he said, "that we've met at last."

"And now that you have?"

"It's more of a dream than ever I dreamed it could be."

Slowly the short thin fingers that work had roughened stroked his hair.

"And for how long will you think that? For how long, my very dear one? For a month, for two months, for a year: for longer than a year? For two years, longer than that even? For how long, then? For ever? Because that's what it must be: for ever, or for nothing. No, no. Don't interrupt me. Listen. That is what it has got to be. That is the only way that I can love you—that way or not at all. We can love, the women of my race, lightly, many

times. But to love really, that comes once only to us, and when it comes it is for the ages. Are you ready for it to be like that?"

The short fingers were vibrant in his hair; the dark face was very close to his. The dark eyes through the dusk were very bright. Seated there at her feet, with the awning of the eternal sky above him, "for-ever" seemed a very little word. She would not let him pronounce it, though.

"No, no," she cried, "not yet. Think well. You have only to say the word 'Come,' and I will follow. But if I do come it will be for ever. My love will be a chain about you: a chain between you and me: a chain that will hold you fast. Hold you for ever to this little island. That is what the word 'Come' will mean. Have you the courage, my very sweet, to say it?"

She spoke slowly; her voice, whose French had the precision of an earlier age, gave to her words the feeling and volume of biblical utterance: it was like some prophecy, some warning out of the Old Testament.

It was with a sense of awe rather than of triumph that he whispered "Come."

§

Past Schelcher on the road to Case Navire there was a bungalow; not a large bungalow. You do not need in the tropics more than two rooms with a verandah round them. And it was a wide verandah with the red of the hibiscus and the purple of the bougainvillea strung in profusion about its porches. It was through a flowered shrubbery

that the steps ran steep from the verandah to the beach. And all day long as he worked at his office, as he played billiards in the Club, as he lunched at his solitary table in the Pension Galliat, the young French official counted the minutes till five o'clock should come, till he should be free to drive out to that bungalow along the mounting, curving road. All day his thoughts would wander from his task and papers, picturing the moment when he could climb the verandah steps, when from a long rattan chair a slim, erect figure would leap to greet him, when dark arms would be flung round his neck, when a face like a dark flower, would be pressed to his. And "What have you been doing all day?" she'ld ask. "Counting the minutes till I could see you again," he'ld answer. And they'ld laugh and run down to the beach to swim side by side through the sunset-reddened water; and afterwards while he sipped slowly at his rum punch she would sit curled beside him, his hand held against her cheek; and she would sing to him in a low voice. For half an hour they would sit there, savouring after the heat of the long day, the unutterable peace of dusk. Then she would jump to her feet. "Supper time," she would say. And she would scamper to the kitchen, to reappear a few minutes later with some simple but exquisitely flavoured dish of eggs and fish and vegetables. After supper they would bring the gramophone out to the verandah, and dance to it. As they danced, they kissed.

It was an idyll too perfect to be compact of details. They never quarrelled. She was never moody, never difficult, never jealous. At times he would surprise on her face a strange and brooding look, as though she were looking at

things, dark things that were many miles, many centuries away. But he had only to touch her on the shoulder, and she would turn round with a shiver and a start, blink quickly, and with a laugh become once again the merry, the adorable companion who asked no more of life but to be in love and loved.

They lived very much to themselves. Though every one in Fort-de-France was well aware of the bungalow on the road past Schelcher, its existence was tacitly ignored. Officially he was still living at the Pension Galliat where he lunched and for the sake of appearances and the occasions when his duties forced him to remain in town he kept on a room. No French family would visit him in the country, and though he would have been himself received and welcomed everywhere he wished to go, he had no wish to go where he could not take her with him. Their only visitors were in consequence her cousins and an occasional man friend of his who would drop in on Saturday or Sunday for a rum punch on his way back to town. For the most part they were alone and were content to be.

"You're very wise," said to him the only man, a middle-aged doctor, who had lived all his life in Martinique, with whom he had cared to discuss the situation more than casually. "You're very wise. Make the best of it while you've got it. It won't come twice. And it couldn't last. It's lucky for you that you're going. It'll be an exquisite memory for you. You're young enough to get over it, both of you."

He looked quickly and intently at the doctor.

"You're sure of that? It's true, is it, what they say about having one's place taken within a week of sailing?"

"Ninety-nine times in a hundred. It's a country of ick forgettings."

"But the hundredth time?"

"I shouldn't worry about that hundredth time, if I re you."

He could not help worrying, however. The time for leave was drawing close: the leave during which his rents would insist almost certainly on his applying for transfer. He did not know how he was to break the ws to her. He did not know how she would take the ws. Were the Martiniquaises really as casual-hearted the Frenchman would have him think? It was only th a half of himself that he hoped they were. He knew w long it would take him to forget the little bungalow Schelcher. And he would have in France so many ings to help him to forget: his career, his friends, his terest in the stir of life: whereas she, what medicine ould she have whose life was absorbed so utterly in his? ow was he to break the news to her?

§

The letter from Paris came authorising his leave. For e first time in three years he walked slowly up the long eep flight of steps, and for the first time in three years e slim erect figure did not leap from the long rattan air to greet him.

For the first time the low voice did not ask, "What have ou been doing with yourself all day?" Instead, the dark es met his not angrily, not suspiciously, not self-pity-gly, but thoughtfully, as though it were from vast dis-

tance of wisdom that that slow look came. "She knows," he thought, "she knows already." And, walking across to her, he put his hand upon her shoulder.

"Pretty one, I've heard from Paris. I'm going on leave in March."

She nodded her head, slowly.

"How long will your leave last?"

"Nine months."

"And you will come back here after it?"

He hesitated. It would have been easy to have promised her, as would the majority of men in his position, that he would. But to her he could not lie; not completely lie, at least. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Darling, how can I tell?" he said. "If it were my own choice I would. You don't need telling that. I shall try to; try my hardest. But my parents, you know what parents are, they have ambition, they'll want me to apply for a transfer, to go somewhere where there's more scope. I don't know, I can't tell what'll happen. Perhaps," again he hesitated, "perhaps it would be better for us to act as though I weren't going to return."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, there are certain arrangements to be made."

"Arrangements, what arrangements? I don't understand you."

"Pretty one, I can't leave you unprovided for."

She looked thoughtfully at him.

"Is it money that you're trying to talk to me about? Because if it is, you needn't. There'll be no need to worry about that. Let's go and bathe."

For the first time in three years they did not speak as

they walked down the steps to the little beach, as they swam side by side together. And afterwards it was not at his feet but on the arm of his chair that she sat as he sipped at his rum punch. And it was not his hand that she held against her cheek, but his hair that her fingers stroked as she sang to him in the tongue that he had never learnt. And to-night there was a new temper to her singing: it was less crooning, more barbaric, almost terrifying.

"What are you singing?" he asked abruptly. "What are those things?"

"They are the songs of my people. They are very old."

Next morning she was once again the laughing, light-hearted comrade that she had been to him through their three shared years. They danced and bathed and swam and kissed just as they always had, and just as though every night were not bringing them nearer to the hour when his steamer sailed. Sometimes he looked wonderingly at her: for all that they had shared, did he know her any better now than he had on that first evening so many moons ago? What was she thinking, what was she feeling? Had she as so many maintained the child's mind that could see no further than to-morrow, that could not picture to itself in advance the actuality of separation? Would she at the last moment break down into a fever of tears and passion? He did not know. But increasingly as the days passed he dreaded what that last night might hold.

When it came, however, it was very different from what he had expected. There was not the angry, hysterical outburst that he had dreaded. Instead it was with an almost maternally protecting tenderness that she drew down his head upon her shoulder to repeat against his ear the low

words he would never hear again: a tenderness more painful than any torrent of anger would have been.

"To-morrow," he thought, "I don't know how I shall have the courage to see it through."

But when the morrow came it brought with it the merciful medicine of haste; there were bags to be packed, trunks to be labelled, good-byes to be said. There was a farewell lunch party for him at the Hotel de France. It was not till he was seated on the balcony of the Club over a last liqueur that he had time to realise what was happening. Then suddenly it flashed on him. This balcony on which he had sat on that first morning three and a half years back, from which he had seen for the first time the green square of the Savane, from which he had met that dark glance looking up at him. Never again would he sit on it, looking out on to the calm white statue. Never again would he drive out from it at the day's end along the curving, mounting road. Never again would that slim, erect figure leap with dark, shining eyes out of a rattan chair to welcome him. Never again. Clear in front of him his future stretched, the future of the average competent young official. There would be a couple more Colonial posts: North Africa, perhaps, or Indo-China. Then in the early thirties influence would secure him a post in Paris; and with Paris would begin the process of settling down; marriage, a prudent marriage; children and the safeguarding of the future. That was what lay ahead; cares, responsibilities, the end of the unknown. While at the back of him was youth and freedom and romance. What could life hold for him sweeter than that bungalow at Schelcher, that love so true and careless, so uncompli-

cated by the maladies of vanity and profit? What had life to offer in compensation for his loss?

His heart was heavy. And suddenly as he sat looking out over the square there was a pain across his eyes, a pain so excruciating that he screamed out loud.

"Good heavens!" shouted some one, "what's the matter?"

"I don't know," he cried. "I'm ill. I'm going to die, I think."

In an instant a little crowd had gathered round him.

"This is what often happens after a farewell lunch," laughed some one.

But a second glance was sufficient to prove that that was not what was wrong with him. Wine could not have brought that livid pallor to the cheeks, that drawn misery across the eyes.

"He's ill. Get a doctor quickly."

The middle-aged doctor who had lived all his life in Martinique looked thoughtfully for a moment at his young friend, lifted an eyelid, felt the heart, then scribbled some words on a piece of paper. "Take that round to the chemist. It may do some good."

In frightened silence the group waited round the moaning figure.

"Will that medicine never come?" said some one.

It came, but it was powerless. The moaning did not cease.

"Take me home, I'm ill. I think I'm dying. Get me home. I can't stay here."

There was an exchange of glances.

"How can we? You're going to France. The steamer's sailing in an hour."

"Steamer. France. Good heavens, do you think I can go on a journey when I feel like this? Get me home, I tell you, get me home."

There was another exchange of glances. The doctor nodded his head.

"Yes, best get him home."

All the way out along the curving, mounting road he groaned and shivered.

They had to carry him up the long steep flight of steps. From a long rattan chair on the verandah an erect, slim figure rose to meet them. They began to explain to her, but she waved aside their explanation.

"Bring him in here," she said.

The bed was already open, the sheets turned back. At the head was a carafe of iced water. She stood quietly by while they laid him down, then seated herself at the bed's foot. The men who had brought him hovered indeterminately in the doorway. Was there anything to be done? they asked. No, there was nothing for them to do the doctor said. They could go back to town. Himself, he'ld stay there.

The slim, erect figure at the foot said nothing. She was looking out over the sea. There was on her face a strange, rapt brooding look, as though she were looking at things, dark things that were many miles and centuries away. From Fort-de-France five miles off came the steamer's siren. She rose out of her chair, walked over to the moaning figure, placed her hand softly on his forehead and with gentle, caressing fingers stroked his hair, murmuring

to him words that to the doctor who had lived in Martinique all his life were strange. And as she stroked the pallor went out of the lined cheeks, the moaning ceased, the taut misery vanished from behind the eyes. With a start and a blink of the eyes he sat up in bed.

"What's the matter?" he said. "I've felt like death. What's happened?"

"Nothing," she said. "It's over. It's all right."

His knees were weak as he tottered on to the verandah to lean against the balcony, to see, steaming slowly on its way to Guadeloupe, the liner that should have taken him back to France. His knees were weak but her hand was pressing on his shoulder. He felt her strength flow to him.

"It's all right, doctor," he said. "You needn't worry."

§

It was with a white and frightened face, however, that five weeks later he broke into the doctor's consulting room.

"Doctor," he said. "What's the matter with me? It's happened again. You've heard?"

"I've heard."

"It's inexplicable. I don't know what it is. It was just like that other time. On the morning that the boat was sailing I woke with that same blinding pain. I couldn't stir, I couldn't think. I was conscious of nothing except that pain. I just lay there moaning: right through the day: right on till evening. And then suddenly just as that other time, it went. I walked out on to the balcony, and I might never have been ill at all. What's wrong with me? What's the matter? Do you know, doctor, what it is?"

"I think I do."

"Then what is it? What's to be done about it?"

"If it's what I think it is, there's nothing that can be done about it. You will think I am romancing: but I have lived all my life among these people. They have secrets that are dark to us. When they want to commit suicide they do not shoot themselves or cut their throats. They lie upon their beds and die. They can will mischief or death upon their enemies. They have philtres that will win them the love of the stubborn-hearted. It would be no hard task for them to make one who wishes to leave them incapable of movement."

"My good doctor, but that's ridiculous."

"That is what I knew you would say. But consider this: there is nothing wrong with you. You can take my word for that. You are as fit as any man in Martinique. Yet each time that you have tried to leave the island, you have been so ill that you could not move; and each time, at the moment when the ship's last siren went, the illness passed."

"It's ridiculous, ridiculous!"

But though he spoke truculently, even to himself his outburst carried no conviction. What were those warning words that three years back on the moon-drenched balcony those soft lips had uttered? "My love will be a chain about you, a chain that will hold you fast: hold you for ever to this little island." It was ridiculous, ridiculous, and yet . . .

Impatiently he walked over to the window. In the street below the familiar commonplace life of every day was pursuing its comfortable course. Motor cars were

honking cheerfully, tourists with cameras and sun-helmets were boisterously calling each other's attention to the handcart announcing a cinema performance that was being pushed by a couple of minute black infants. Across the harbour a four-masted schooner was picturesquely drifting. The sheltered tables in front of the café on the Savane were filled with laughing, chattering groups. It was impossible to believe that contiguous with this merry, familiar, sunlit world existed the dark mysteries of Obeah. Impossible to believe, and yet, and yet . . .

With a frightened face he spun round to face the doctor.

"You believe it, doctor? Really and truly that's what you believe?"

"Yes."

"Then what's going to happen to me? What'll be the end of it? Do you mean that it'll go on like this, that every time I try to leave the island I shall be ill? That I never shall be able to get away from here? Is that what you believe?"

The doctor nodded his head.

"But I can't, no, I can't," the young man persisted. "To stay here for ever, to grow old here, to watch one's career going: never to see France again: to have one's juniors coming out here, and three years later going back, as oneself one should have, to promotion: to lose interest in oneself; to lose faith in oneself; to lose one's self-respect. You can't really believe that that's what's got to happen to me?"

"Till the spell is broken, yes."

"And how is it to be broken?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. It was an expres-

sive shrug. And looking him in the eyes the young man read his meaning. "I can't," he thought, "I can't." Though even as he thought it he knew that, were that calamity to be averted there was no other course. Sorcery and the sorceress were one. Even sorcery could not outlive the snapping of the thin thread of life that bound it to its origin. It was his life or hers. As long as she lived he was her slave. As long as that . . . but for no longer. "I can't," he thought, "I can't." But there was no other course.

Slowly, with a tread that dragged, he climbed that evening the steep flight of steps to the verandah. And for the second time in their many months together the slim, erect figure did not leap to greet him. From the long rattan chair she lay and looked at him, not angrily, not suspiciously, but thoughtfully, as though it were from vast distances of wisdom that that slow look came.

She beckoned to him.

"Here, at my side, just gently, for a moment."

On the ground beside her chair she dropped a cushion. As he knelt on it she drew down his head upon her breast.

"It's so lovely here. All day long I've been lying, looking out, wishing you were here to share it with me. Have you ever seen anything lovelier?"

It was very lovely. The hour before sundown when the air after the long day's heat is cool; when the lights grow gentle after the long day's glare; when the shadows lie level along road and beach; when the blue of the sea grows softer, and the bright greens of the hill grow fresh as though dew were falling on them.

"Have you ever seen anything lovelier?" she said. "Do

you think that anywhere in the world there is to be found anything lovelier than this? Do you not think that the man is foolish who would run away from it?"

Her voice was low and musical. But there was purpose behind her words. And he felt weak and irresolute; in the presence of something old and dark and very powerful. And he felt tired: grateful in his tiredness for the softness of the cradling breasts, content to lie there, savouring the peace of evening, watching across the bay in front of them the little steamer paddling from Saint Pierre to Fort-de-France.

"Let's go and bathe," she said.

Side by side they swam through the sunset-reddened water, and afterwards as he sat sipping at his rum punch she crouched beside him, his hand held against her cheek, while she sang softly to him the love songs of her people. For half an hour she sang to him. Then she jumped to her feet. "Supper time," she cried. It was his favourite dish that she had prepared for him: lobster spiced with coconut, served upon fried bread. Afterwards they brought the gramophone out upon the verandah. As they danced, they kissed.

§

That was the story as the Frenchman told it us.

"And that's fifteen years ago," he said, "and the man she did it for's been dead for five; and they keep her because they just daren't not."

We listened in silence. Below us in the street motor cars were honking noisily. Out of a clear blue sky a heavy January sun was pouring its amber light across the green

Savane on to the white statue. In the harbour were the funnels and the masts of liners. It was hard in such a moment at such a place to believe in the black magic of Africa.

And yet, and yet . . .

"I think," said Eldred, "we'll have our table changed tonight."

Floria's face showed no pleasure or satisfaction when we told her of our decision. Her scowl was as surly as ever. Her incompetence was as marked. She spilt the soup over the tablecloth, clattered the plates, brought us our fish cold, and butter not till we had ceased to need it. We had a thoroughly uncomfortable meal.

But that night we slept.

MID-PACIFIC

III

THE Englishman, we are always told, is a bad lover. He is unenterprising. He is chary of pretty speeches and appropriate gifts. The most that a Frenchman will concede him is the possibility that he may be a worthy husband. Latins attribute this insufficiency to the bleakness of our climate. But I wonder whether the true cause does not lie in the Englishman's resolute respect for the necessity for discretion. Whatever the emancipated may protest, a puritan influence hangs over England. The belief still persists that there are only two kinds of women; good and bad, and that the good woman can only experience love in marriage. Chastity is assumed to be an essential quality of womanhood to such an extent that there is no need for her by English law to prove special damages against the man who slanders her reputation. An Eng-

lishman would no more boast of a success in love than would a Yale man of being "tapped for Bones." His first concern is the good name of the woman he is in love with, a concern that places a check upon his gallantry. Nervous lest gifts and pretty speeches should give the impression that he has a right to make them, he remains stolid and unemotional. He will pride himself more on his discretion than on his audacity. His only boast would be that his name had never been coupled with any woman's.

That anyhow was the Victorian attitude. And it still remains. In the most unlikely spots it will come to flower.

In my experience it blossomed, of all unexpected places, in mid-Pacific, in the personality of about the quaintest figure with which my travelling has brought me into contact.

I was bound for Tahiti, by the Messageries Maritimes Intermediate Service and in the way that dramatic characters should, he had his entrance into my life prepared.

"I think," the commissaire announced one morning, "that I've good news for you. There's an English passenger, a man called Topham, getting on at Colon."

Good news! It was more than good news. It was the most exciting thing that had happened to us since we had left Marseilles; happened at the very moment too when we had begun to wonder how we were to preserve our sanity during the three weeks that lay between us and Tahiti. We had been twenty days at sea; and those who have travelled lengthily will know what that means. A long sea voyage is a testing business. By the start of the second week every topic of talk has been exhausted, every personal idiosyncrasy explored. Twenty days at sea with

three weeks ahead of you. There is no traveller who will not know what that means. Nor were the conditions of this particular trip designed to make the experience less exacting.

There were only twenty passengers aboard, of whom no more than five were English. Our ship was undisguisedly a cargo boat. It had no promenade decks, no music-room, no lounges, no opportunities for games, no place to walk. It was not easy to find employment for the long, sun-laden hours. We had begun by organising a sweepstake on the ship's run. But there exists no class more economical than that of the French colonial official. Not one member of it could be persuaded to enter; and when, at the end of ten days, we discovered that each of us had drawn the winning number twice, we came to feel that the labour of writing numbers and drawing for them was greater than the excitement over a ten franc win which the next day's run would cancel. We had tried to organise bridge. But there were not four people on the ship who could recognise an informatory double. The long delays of chess had proved to be a strain rather than a relaxation. There was nothing to be done, we had soon realised, but lounge on the deck in a canvas chair and wait for the next meal.

Arguments as to whether in London it was nine o'clock in the morning or three o'clock in the afternoon when it was mid-day in mid-Atlantic, had tended to become acrimonious.

"Heaven knows how we're going to keep sane," Seymour had remarked on the morning after we sailed from Fort-de-France. He was a Manchester man, an agent in cotton

goods, in the early forties, who ten days back had completed the typing of his final price-lists, and to whom inaction was more irksome than the rest of us. "We've got two more days in this appalling heat," he said. "Then Panama, and after that three solid weeks without sight of land. We'll be lucky if we aren't gibbering idiots before we see the first palm tree."

The remainder of us—Kingston, a retired actor with his wife and sister-in-law, Miss Rumford, who were proposing to make a permanent home in the islands, and myself—nodded our heads gloomily. It was a drab prospect. Twenty-one days of the Pacific; each day repeating its predecessor in every detail. It was not surprising that we should find exuberantly exciting the news that another Englishman was to join us at Panama.

"Thank heaven," said Kingston, "we'll have some one new to talk to."

"And something new to talk about," said Miss Rumford. "I wonder what on earth he's like."

And, indeed, it was a subject full of possibilities. Even in these days the Englishmen are few who have visited the Islands, and there cannot be many who have started their journey from Panama. Colon was about the last place in the world where you would expect to find an Englishman bound for the South Seas. It was certain that some unusual disposition of character or circumstance must have placed him there.

"He's probably a naturalist," said Kingston, "who's been collecting specimens in Central America. That's as good a reason as any for wanting to go to the South Seas."

"More likely there's been a scandal," I suggested, re-

membering a previous visit to Tahiti. "He's got to get out of the Canal Zone and daren't go back to England."

"Or, perhaps," said Mrs. Kingston, "he's a movie man looking for good film scenes."

"Whatever happens," said Seymour, "he's bound to be pretty interesting."

Through the whole of lunch we discussed this fertile and fascinating problem.

So eager indeed did the discussion become that we decided finally to hold a sweepstake. A list of questions should be drawn up as to age, appearance, profession, history, character of this mysterious passenger. We should each write down what we imagined he would be, and the one whose answers were nearest to the truth should win. In the event of doubt the answers were to be handed to the passenger himself who should decide on the result. Our last day in the Caribbean was the most amusing we had spent since our second day out of Europe. The morning we spent in separate corners of the deck filling in our answer forms. At lunch we read them out, comparing our conclusions.

Our guesses were widely dissimilar.

Mrs. Kingston pictured him as a film-producer. Her sister as a naturalist. Kingston as an invalid searching for an equitable climate. Seymour, whose mind had a Latin twist, maintained that he was an agent in the White Slave traffic. Myself, remembering the strange sea-weed that is cast up on the beach of that far island, pictured him as a rum-runner who was using Tahiti as a convenient base.

"As likely as not," said Seymour, "he won't prove to

be any of those things. My word, but that first sight of him's going to be exciting."

It has been said though, many hundred times, that it is the very things that one has most looked forward to that mean the least on their arrival.

We had been counting the hours to our first sight of Topham, but we had forgotten how completely that excitement would be displaced by the thrill of the ship's mooring against the wharf. Here, after three weeks of water, were broad streets and shops and restaurants; American magazines and Spanish shawls; cinemas and cabarets, and jazz. The moment the gang-plank was lowered Seymour and I were hurrying down it, eager to waste no minute of this twenty-four hours' respite. For two hours we did not speak of Topham; nor were we thinking of him, when we returned to the ship at half-past six to change our shirts before going back into the town for dinner, to find that at the head of the plank a lively discussion was being fought between a large Spanish half-caste and a small wizened middle-aged Englishman in a faded grey flannel suit.

"It's no good your arguing," the Englishman was saying. "The money that I set aside for tips was stolen from me somewhere in your town. That money represented all that I intended to pay out in this town, and I'm not going to pay a dollar more. It's no good your arguing about a tip. I'm not going to give you one."

The Spaniard was too astounded to be articulate. Towering above the little Englishman he shouted and waved his arms, invoking high Heaven in a flood of incomprehensibly confused Spanish and American.

The Englishman remained perfectly calm, however.

"It's no good talking," he said, "you'll get no tip," and turning away, he picked up the suitcase which presumably had been carried from the hotel by the half-caste porter, and walked across the deck towards his cabin indifferent to the volleyed oaths with which he was pursued.

Seymour and I exchanged a glance of admiring wonderment.

"I suppose," I said, "that's Topham."

Seymour nodded his head.

"Whether he's a rum-runner or a naturalist or a movie man or a white slave trader or an invalid, he's very certainly going to prove good value. Let's go and rout the old boy out."

We found him in the dining-room arranging his seat at a table with the maître d'hôtel, in French as odd as that of any New Zealand Tommy; so odd that even had there been no curiosity to spur me, I should have had to have offered him my assistance.

"Can I be of help?" I asked.

At the sound of my voice he started and turned around, a look of dismay on his lined thin face.

"What," he cried, "you, an Englishman. But you aren't travelling on this ship?"

"As far as Tahiti," I told him.

The look of dismay on his face deepened.

"As far as Tahiti?" he repeated, "on a French ship too. Well, I am surprised! Not any others, are there?"

"There's Seymour here," I told, "then there's Kingston and his wife."

"His wife?" Topham echoed, with the look of dismay very nearly turned to terror.

"But I never thought—" he began. "There aren't any more I suppose?" he added.

"Only Kingston's sister-in-law."

"His sister-in-law and his wife, two women. But I had never expected to find Englishwomen on a French cargo boat."

He spoke slowly with a voice that one felt was guarding itself closely against a cockney twist. His obvious disappointment was astonishing in a person who not being able to speak French must have been anticipating three weeks of complete solitude. He certainly seemed as though he were going to justify every anticipation of unconventionality.

"There will be six of us altogether," I said, "so we shan't be too bad a party."

"Of course," I added, turning towards the maître d'hôtel, "Mr. Topham will be sitting with us."

"Of course," said the maître d'hôtel, "I had in fact arranged for him to sit next to Miss Rumford."

Topham had not understood what he was saying. He looked from one to the other of us with a puzzled and perturbed expression.

"What's that?" he said. "What's that you have arranged?"

"That you should sit with us," I answered, "next to Miss Rumford."

Topham started, seemed about to protest, then thinking better of it, nodded his head twice quickly.

"Oh, well," he said, "I suppose sooner or later one has to. It doesn't matter much."

His behaviour was as surprising as could well be. The sweepstake promised to be far more entertaining than I had expected.

"You'll find it a jolly trip right enough," I said. "In the meantime hadn't you better come along with us this evening? We're dining in the town."

He raised his eyebrows at that.

"What, dining in the town when you've dinner waiting for you on board? That means you'll pay twice for the same dinner!"

"If you had been eating the same cook's handiwork for three weeks you wouldn't think twice about that," I laughed. "You'll have had enough French dinners before you've reached the Islands."

He shook his head.

"No, no," he said, "I couldn't do that. I couldn't possibly do that. I have been a week here. I've spent much too much in this town already. I never allow myself to spend on an average more than ten pounds a week, I've spent fifteen here, the ticket to Tahiti is thirty pounds. I'll be five pounds down on the month. A little more with tips flung in; then there was that money I had stolen. Oh, no; I should never feel justified in paying for two dinners."

I was not prepared, however, to let him go so easily.

"In that case," I said, "why don't you come with us as our guest?"

Again he shook his head.

"I've made it a rule never to accept any hospitality that I can't return."

"But that's absurd," said Seymour, "it would be such fun for us; and after all we haven't had our purses stolen."

He still refused.

"No, no," he said, "one must make rules and one must keep to them. Possibly I will join you later."

We were very certain, however, that he would not, and though we gave him careful instructions how to reach us and kept a place reserved at the balcony of the "Over the Top," we had little hope of seeing that grey-flannelled wizened figure with the shrewd, half-downright, half-suspicious expression on its face, threading its way between the close-packed tables.

So we drank our drinks and danced our dances, and let the problems of the morrow await themselves.

And indeed they were problems. The more we saw of Topham the more baffling he became. Not that we saw, or rather not that we were permitted to see a great deal. He always arrived at table five minutes after the rest of us, and the moment he finished his meal he left. He took no share whatever in the conversation. He would prefer to go without salt rather than ask Miss Rumford for it. During the day he did not sit on the deck with the rest of us, but went right into the forepart of the ship; because he preferred the sun, he told me once, but because, I am very certain, he wanted to be alone. The rest of his time he spent in his cabin, and always he kept his door locked. I discovered this one afternoon when I turned the handle of his door in the belief that it was mine.

Our attempts to lead him into conversation were melancholy failures. To begin with we endeavoured to be diplomatic. We would, for example, introduce casually

the subjects in which we had imagined him to be interested.

"I am told," Mrs. Kingston would remark, "that there are very fine possibilities for the development of the filming industry in Central America. The scenery in Guatemala is probably unique."

"I should doubt, however," said Seymour, "whether the actual climate, the atmospheric climate is as good here as it would be in the South Seas."

"I wonder," said Miss Rumford.

And we would pause, waiting for Topham to interpose some remark. No such remark came, however, so in exchange the question of natural fauna was produced.

"They tell me," Miss Rumford would say, "that the vegetation in the Society Islands has no great interest for the naturalist."

"I've heard that too," said Mrs. Kingston.

Again there was the pause, and again there was no interjection.

The same silence greeted Seymour's suppositions concerning the moral lapses of the Salvadoranians, my remarks on the difficulties of shipping rum into America, and Kingston's elaborate digressions on the spread of leprosy and elephantiasis. In none of these subjects did Topham betray the merest flickered eye-lid of an interest.

"We're all pretty well on the wrong tack, I'm afraid," said Kingston. "We'd best start a more direct form of cross-examination."

Even here we were not very much more successful.

His presence in the Canal Zone was explained simply. He had come by a Shaw-Savill boat that had left Liver-

pool a couple of days after the French boat had left Marseilles, and had reached Balboa a week before it. He was going to stay in the island as long as the cool weather lasted. Time was of no account to him. He was unmarried, without ties. No particular interest was taking him to Tahiti, just as no particular interest appeared to engross him.

Money was the one subject over which he showed any real concern. What business he had carried on we were unable to discover. It had been in London though, and he had retired some six years back with his money invested in gilt-edged securities—"well-buttoned-up" was his phrase for it. He had, we gathered, about five hundred pounds a year, the sum on which his allowance of ten pounds a week was based. Beyond this allowance he would not go. He was as economical as a French housewife. The single suitcase which had been the cause of the dispute between the Spanish porter and himself, contained his entire wardrobe. He did his own laundry, washing each night the shirt that he had worn during the day. He darned his own socks, pressed his own collars, polished his own shoes. He was not going to waste a penny more than he need in tips. He understood the business of "buttoning up." During his three weeks with us he did not sign one chit, he did not have a deck chair, he did not join the library, he did not order a single drink.

When any one offered him drinks he refused them. "Never accept hospitality I can't return," he said. Even on the Fourth of July he put his hand over his glass when the champagne was passed round after dinner.

"There's no chance," grumbled Seymour, "of getting confessions out of him when he's drunk."

"Probably there's nothing to find out," said Kingston, "probably he's just a very ordinary, very unsociable person, travelling to avoid income-tax, not caring where he goes provided he hasn't got a residence in England."

It was an estimate that the others were ready to endorse. Before we were ten days out of Colon Kingston and Seymour had lost interest in him. There was nothing to him, they maintained. He had provided them for a few days with some amusing conversation. One should be grateful to him for that. But there it ended.

I was not certain though. There seemed more to this South Sea visit than a mere reluctance to pay income-tax. There were so many peculiar circumstances. I could not, for instance, see why Topham should have put himself to the trouble and expense of changing ships. The difference between the train ticket from London to Marseilles and London to Liverpool was disproportionate to the expense of a week in the Canal Zone. I remembered, too, his surprise and his dismay on finding English people and English women on the boat. And there was his secrecy. He was a crank, of course, that was obvious. At the same time I did not feel him to be a boorish person. He seemed rather the kind of person with whom had you found yourself next to him in a football match you would have drifted into conversation. He had probably no such romantic history as our lists had given him, but I could not, all the same, believe him to be quite ordinary.

"It'll be fun," I thought, "to see what he makes of it in Tahiti. I'll be looking out for him."

But of course when the time came, when at last after three-and-forty days of ocean I saw once again the cloud-covered peaks of the diadem and the crested outline of Moorea, Topham was the last thing I thought of.

The sun was shining on the little town, on to the painted bungalows and the green flamboyants. Canoes were paddling within the reef. Children were bathing in the lagoon. Half the population of Papeete was clustered along the wharf; there was a waving of hands and a shouting of Christian names. One had no time to think of Topham at such an hour.

I had only a glimpse of a small grey-flannelled figure, in a dusty panama hat, with his suitcase in his hand, hurrying, economical to the last, through the thronging crowd towards the Customs. But I scarcely noticed him; there was so much else to be done, so many people to be seen. "Oh, well," I thought, "I'll probably see enough of him later on."

I should have known better than to have thought that. One meets people on a boat, one takes their telephone number and address, one arranges meetings, then one's own life catches one up and one drifts apart. Ordinarily shipboard friendships do not last. Even of the Kingstons I saw very little after I had once landed in Tahiti. There were my own friends waiting. There was Moorea to be visited. By the next mail boat there were friends arriving from California. In a very few days I had relaxed into the dream life of that dream island where everything that you do and say and think has the texture, the unreality of a dream.

I forgot the elaborate questionnaire that we had set our-

selves in mid-Pacific. I scarcely troubled to ask questions about Topham, and those of my friends of whom I made enquiries had not heard of him. He was leading on shore the same secret life that he had led on board. It was curious. But there was so much else to occupy one's attention.

Once only I caught sight of him strolling along the water front, at the side of a plump, buxom woman, in the late forties; an indulgent half-caste I assumed, though at a distance of fifty yards I could not see for sure. I quickened my pace, but before I could reach him he had turned away into a side street. There was no reason to believe that he had seen me, that he had turned aside on purpose, but all the same I believed he had. I shrugged my shoulders. "Odd," I thought, "he's an odd creature"; and let the matter slip my mind.

And the days went by, serene and lovely under that gentle heaven, under that gracious sun; the calm, untroubled days that were drawing me nearer to the hour when my ship should sail, when I should say good-bye, forever probably, to the green island which must remain always in the background of the mind of every one who has known and loved it; the green and lovely island which at first sight seems to be bringing every dream of one's life to flower.

Those final hours there are hard to bear. When one sees one's last sunset, crimson and gold behind Moorea, and a few hours later one's last moonrise silvering the palm fronds, one regrets bitterly that one has eaten of the forbidden fruit, that one has acquired the worldliness that must stand with a drawn sword at the Gates of Eden.

They are few who have waved good-bye to Tahiti with dry eyes.

My heart was heavy on that last morning when I drove in from the bungalow that was once Gauguin's studio, along the narrow road with the waning moon growing fainter and the lilac deepening about Moorea; as I sat on the verandah of the Mariposa Café drinking my last cup of Tahitian coffee; waiting for the last bag of copra to be loaded on to the *Makura,* waiting for the shriek of its whistle to rally the straggling tourists. No one was further, at that moment, from my mind than Topham. It was with the greatest surprise that I saw his shabby figure shuffling along the water-front.

"I heard you were leaving by this boat," he said. "There's something I would rather like to say to you. Could I speak to you alone a minute?"

I followed him along the water-front past the little knot of trading schooners.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you must have thought me pretty rude. It was an awful shock to me, you know. I hadn't thought there would be any English people on the ship, and I had come out that way specially to avoid meeting English people. I'd taken the Shaw-Savill boat from Liverpool so that my friends should think I was going to New Zealand; then taking up that French boat at Colon, I felt certain I'ld get to Tahiti without any one knowing it. When I found all you people there, I thought the best thing was to keep myself to myself as much as possible."

As far as understanding him went, I was as completely in the dark as ever.

"But surely you must understand," he said. "You must have guessed. Why, you saw us together."

I was no wiser than before.

"I'm afraid," I said, "that I don't understand you."

"But you saw me with her," he said, "the English girl that I came out here to meet. The French Islands seemed the best place to keep things quiet. I sent her round by Australia so there would be no danger of people talking."

I looked at him in amazement. In Tahiti, which had been called "The country of love" so often and so truly, this talk of secrecy and people finding out seemed as unreal as would in London the freedom that is universally enjoyed in the South Seas.

"But even so," I said, "I don't quite see the necessity for all that secrecy."

"Why surely it must be obvious," he said. "Those English women, Miss Rumford and Kingston's wife; if I'd got friendly with them on the ship, when we arrived in Tahiti I'ld have had to introduce my friend to them, and it wouldn't have been fair to her. You see we aren't married and it would have got her talked about."

TIARE TAHITI

IV

THERE are some peoples that have no written history: whose story is handed down in song and fable, changing with the changing outlooks of children and great-grandchildren. There are some peoples who do not see their history in terms of dates and conquests and beleaguered towns; certain self-contained peoples whose curiosity goes no further than a brooding wonderment: "Why are we here, whence do we come, whither do we go?"; who seek only for an explanation of their immediate background.

The Polynesian is such a people.

Most days during the weeks I spent on the island of Moorea a native girl from the village of Papetoai would row across the bay to the house where I was staying. During the mornings she would fish and swim with us; diving under the clear pale water; her black hair spread out in a

fan behind her. In the evenings she would take her ukulele and sing in her crooning voice the soft Tahitian tunes, for which the ears of those who have once heard them will be always lonely. Sometimes seated on the verandah, her feet drawn beneath her white and red patterned pareo, she would tell us the stories of her people; the legends by which the Polynesian explains the nature of the phenomena that surround him: that tell why the milk of the coconut is sweet upon the tongue, why at nightfall a cool wind blows seawards from the hills, why the streams are plentiful with fish. Many of her stories have been collected and retold by one who has made his home there.[1]

One later legend, however, he did not tell.

§

For several days we had not seen Nadia. And when at last we saw her ground her canoe upon the beach before the house, we burst out laughing. On her face was a look of serene contentment, and behind her left ear was the white tiare flower.

"We know now why you have been away," we said.

She looked downward, demurely, a smile playing on her mouth.

"I am very happy," she replied.

That evening she sang with a deeper, tenderer note that sweetest of Polynesian songs:

Ave, ave te vahini upipi
E patia tona, e pareo repo.

[1] "The Golden Octopus." By Viscount Hastings.

It was a typical island night; warm and scented. And she was a part, exquisitely, of that loveliness; in harmony with the soft scents, the low wash of the sea upon the coral, the moon-silvered palm fronds.

"Tell us, Nadia, why is it that you wear that flower behind your ear?" we asked.

She widened her eyes wonderingly.

"But you must know that," she said. "I had thought that was the first thing one was told on coming to the islands."

"Oh, yes, we know that," we told her. "But the history, the significance of those white petals?"

"They are the finger-tips of Tehaura, Princess of Taravao."

"And who was she, Nadia?"

"The beloved of Atahoe. Prince of Pæa."

She answered solemnly, in the deep almost abstract tone that her voice assumed when she spoke of her people's legends. And it was slowly, solemnly in a French that had almost a biblical austerity, that she began her story.

§

Tehaura, she said, was the most beautiful woman that had been ever born of mortals; so beautiful that the spirits who guard the narrow isthmus of Taravao and the broad valley of Papara vowed that her beauty should never pass beyond their limits; that it must remain to enrich permanently the loveliest district of the world's loveliest island.

"Then how, in that case, shall she marry," her father

asked, "since there is no one in the district worthy of her? And the Princes of Papenoo and Pæa and Tautira will wish to take her away with them to their own places."

"If there is no stranger worthy of her, who loves her enough to be content to remain here with her, then must she perforce stay virgin and unwed in Taravao."

The Princess bowed her head.

"I am well content," she said.

And so on the high spur of land that overlooks the isthmus she herself built a throne, set round with the rich foliage of the island's growth, the red and white of the hibiscus, the stately plumes of the bamboo, the scarlet and gold of the flamboyant. Day long she would lie there, her eyes fixed broodingly on the high outline of Tautira, while the handmaidens who served her would plait wreaths of flowers for her head, and knot white bands of shark's teeth for her wrist and ankles; setting before her when the sun was high, breadfruit and *poi* and *fei* and the small-finned fish that their brothers speared in the cool valleys, flavouring them with the thick drained milk of a green coconut.

And afterwards, while she slept, they would fan her with the long jagged leaves of the banana plant; later, when the sun lowered on to Papara they would accompany her when she went down to the grey-black beach to bathe; and in the evening when the air was cool, and the moon had risen goldenly above the isthmus, they would sing to her, their soft island songs, and she would lie there, listening and silent.

Every day it was like that; except once a month, on

the morning when the moon was full. Then they would set out, she and her twenty handmaidens, to the round pool in the hills, whose side is worn so smooth with the movement of the stream, that you can slide down fifteen feet of rock into the clear cool water. And all day long they would stay there, clambering up to the smooth rock, laughing as they were rushed down its slippery flank into the chill water, picnicing off wild fruit and the shrimps they had speared in the stream on their way up.

In the whole month this was the only time that the Princess left the high shadow of her throne. And it was as she was on the way to this pool, that she met in the roadway coming to meet her a young man, tall and strong and handsome. He was the tallest, strongest, most handsome man that she had ever seen. A man, too, who was strange to her, who did not move to one side humbly, bowing as he passed, but stood upright in her path, his eyes fixed on her.

They were dark eyes; keen and burning, and her knees felt weak.

Her voice as she spoke, however, was firm and regal.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"My name is Atahoe. I am Prince of Pæa."

"My name is Tehaura. I am Princess of Taravao. What road are you taking through our district?"

"Yours."

And turning, he followed at her side through the cool shadows of the valley; not speaking, but helping her with outstretched hand to leap from stone to stone, pausing

now and again to stab at the shrimps and small-finned fishes that darted between the rocks. It was not till they had reached the pool, had bathed and were sitting beside the rock while the women were preparing the meal that at last he spoke.

"You are the most beautiful woman," he said, "that I have ever seen. I was on my way to Tautira to choose myself a bride. But there is no need for me to cross the isthmus of Taravao. You will return with me to Pæa."

His voice was tender, and his eyes were bright, and in the heart of Tehaura came suddenly weakness and a love of weakness. Nevertheless, she shook her head.

"You are the strongest and handsomest man that I have ever seen, but I cannot go with you to Pæa. The spirits have decreed that I shall never cross the isthmus of Taravao or the broad valley of Papara."

"Then you will never see the island of Moorea."

"Why should I wish to see it? Have I not my shaded arbour and my many flowers? And is there not across the water the unchanging outline of Tautira?"

"To the eyes that have not seen Moorea, the outline of Tautira is the loveliest thing beneath the moon. But the eyes have not seen beauty that have not seen Moorea."

And wooingly, in tender phrases he spoke of the towered grandeur of that sister island; of its high pinnacles, of the aureole of lights that play upon it, the rose of dawn, the lilac and gold of sunset, the greens and browns and purples of the midday heat. And all his praise of Moorea was a wooing of her; a turning of her away from her shaded arbour to the sharing of another life.

"If you would see Moorea," he said, "you must desert your arbours."

And as he spoke, the weakness and the love of weakness strengthened in Tehaura's heart.

"But the spirits that guard the valley of Papara have sworn that I shall never pass," she whispered.

"The spirits of Pæa are stronger than the spirits of Papara," said Atahoe. "After the meal, when the women sleep, we will steal down to the beach and make our way by sea through the reef where the spirits of my district will take care of you."

Quicker than usual it seemed to the handmaidens of Tehaura sleep came that afternoon upon the eyelids of their Princess. The meal had been scarcely half an hour finished before the sound of steady breathing mingled with the trickle of the water into the pool.

Rested upon his elbow Atahoe watched the handmaidens of Tehaura fall one by one asleep. When the sound of even breathing had come from the last outstretched figure he lifted himself and moving over to Tehaura, touched her on the shoulder.

Quietly, scarcely breathing, they hurried back down the valley towards the beach.

On the edge of the road that skirts the island was a small bamboo hut, roofed with the dried boughs of the coconut palm. In the doorway of the hut an old man was sitting.

"If you will wait here an instant I will go down to the beach and arrange for a boat," said Atahoe. And the old man he charged to watch over Tehaura, to let no one enter, to let no one know she was within.

"Guard her well," he said, and hurried down to the beach, to where some fishermen were busy with their nets.

He strode straight up to them and breaking the band of pearls and shark's teeth that was about his neck, "Take these," he said, "for one day's use of your canoe."

Within three minutes he was bounding back excitedly to the little hut beside the road.

In the road outside the hut, however, there was no old man sitting. "So that is how he guards," thought Atahoe. "He would suffer for that if I had time."

Which he had not; already, he knew well, the hand-maidens of his beloved would be searching their charge along the valley, spreading the news of the escape.

Eagerly he bounded into the hut: to pause, astounded on the threshold.

"Empty," he cried, "empty!"

From the doorway above his head, he heard a grunt; and lifting his eyes he saw the old man tied up against the roof. His first instinct was to drive his spear through the wretch's body. But he stayed his hand, knowing that there were questions that must be set. Before he had time to put them, however, the blubbering explanation had been given. The old man was distraught with fear. A great wind had caught him up, he said. Unseen hands had tied him there. The damsel had vanished before his eyes. With a heavy heart Atahoe listened. So the spirits of Papara had prevailed. For this one time at least, he added.

Wearily he walked out into the high road. And with

his back turned on Tautira and the bride he had come questing, he trudged back to Pæa.

§

That night he sat silent and wrathful on his throne, not noticing the singing girls who sat obediently at his feet, waiting for him to command their song. "By land the spirits of Papara and Taravao are all powerful," he thought. "But surely by sea they have no authority. To-morrow, when she bathes at sundown, I will take her away in my canoe."

So on the following afternoon when the sun was sinking below its height, he drew out through the reef past the bright groves of coral, and the many-coloured fish, and in the declining sunlight paddled his way towards the headland of Tautira.

As the first stars were beginning to show through the pale violet of the sky, he turned the prow of his canoe into the bay below the shaded arbour. And there, bathing with her handmaidens was Tehaura, and his heart leapt at the sight of her, and at the sound of the soft gasp that her voice gave at the sight of him. As he drew close, she lifted her arms out of the water and called to him. "Come quickly, oh, come quickly!" Her voice was breathless with her need of him. But as he bent down to lift her out of the water into his canoe, at the very instant that her arms met behind his neck, the smooth softness of her arms became slippery and cold, so that he shuddered and suddenly there was no weight upon his neck, nor any longer in his nostrils the scent of coconut from her hair,

and in his arms was lightness, and beside his boat there was a splash and a long eel dived beneath it, slithering away towards the beach. Aghast, his eyes gazed on emptiness and his ears heard the wail of women. Once again the spirits of Papara had prevailed.

§

But it was to be for the last time. Of that he was resolved. Next morning he gathered together the dozen or so men of his own bodyguard. "This time," he said, "we will take guard against the spirits. We will surround Tehaura in her shaded arbour so that neither men nor spirits can take her from us."

And so that night in their canoes they sailed out in the moonlight through the reef, and when morning came, they were placed each of them at his post about the arbour. With ropes and a long net, they had drawn a circle round her so that there should be no escape. Quietly they waited; waited until the sun was high; till all was quiet after the midday meal; till sleep had fallen on to the shaded arbour. Then, with a cry, Atahoe leapt into the circle that his men had drawn and with a cry Tehaura and the handmaidens woke from sleep. Frightened and panting the young women scattered to the circle's edge. But Tehaura sat still upon her wooden throne. At the sight of Atahoe her eyes had widened, she spread out her arms and her lips moved. Atahoe sprang towards her.

But as he sprang it seemed to those watching that he sprang into the heart of fire. It was as though a mantle of flame had fallen about Tehaura and her plants and

flowers. Atahoe stumbled like a blinded man. "My loved one!" he cried, "I have lost her. I cannot find her. In vain I seek her!" And he bent his head low into his flame. The flame was white and it seemed that his right ear as it bent down was covered with a white flower of fire. Then suddenly with a cry he straightened. "My loved one, my beloved!" he called out. "I have found you! I have found you!" It seemed as though some dark bough was wrapped about his neck. "It is the brown arm of Tehaura," whispered the handmaidens; and the fingers of the dark bough caressed his neck softly over his left ear, like a fiery flower. Then suddenly fire and shadow were alike extinguished and where had stood the throne of Tehaura and Tehaura herself and Atahoe, was a tree with low boughs and white sweet-smelling flowers. "The spirits that are all powerful," said the handmaidens, "have taken their revenge and given their reward."

And those who had watched remembered how a white flower of flame had lain behind Atahoe's right ear when he had called "I seek my love!" And a white flower of flame behind his left ear when he had cried "I have found my love!" And so in memory of the two lovers who had conspired against the spirits that guard the narrow isthmus of Taravao and the broad valley of Papara, the bodyguard and the handmaidens went forward and plucked flowers from the tree, and those that were in search of love put the flower behind their right ear and those that were happy in love put the flower behind the left ear. And the roots of the tree were taken and planted throughout the island and its sister island. And in memory of Tehaura and Atahoe the Polynesians have all time held as a symbol of love

that sweet-smelling flower that once to have smelt is to be for all time lonely for.

§

That is the story as Nadia told it to us on the verandah of a Moorean bungalow, with a smile of content upon her lips, and behind her left ear the sweet-smelling bloom of the tiare.

POLYNESIAN

V

Of Tahiti's many legends that alone is a straightforward love-story. It is by the white peoples that Tahiti has been called "love's land." To the Tahitians themselves love comes too naturally to seem worth speaking of. They accept love-making as the fabric of their lives. They do not complicate it as we do. Their imagination does not work on it. They love less in consequence.

Primitive natures when they love, are either brutal and possessive or astonishingly matter-of-fact. During the coal strike of 1921 the regular Reserve of officers was recalled to the colours. I was stationed in Newcastle. After the second week a brother officer, a ranker, and three years married, confessed that he was finding the conditions of celibacy a strain.

"I think I must get the wife up here for a week-end,"

he said, "or maybe I'll pick up something in the town. I must figure it out and see which'ld be the cheaper."

Whether the Tahitians ever were passionate and possessive I do not know. To-day they certainly are not. The only case of jealousy I encountered there was Gilbertian rather than Tolstoian.

It was an evening I am unlikely to forget.

Its drama had begun a few hours before I became a spectator of it with the decision of the proprietor of the General Garage that he would have no need that evening of his mechanic's services.

With a grateful smile the tall wide-shouldered Tahitian half-caste had walked out of the garage where he had expected to be on duty till the early hours of the morning.

It was after seven and a Thursday, and all that afternoon a cart loaded with small boys and drums, and placarded with a portrait of Anita Stewart, had driven through the streets of Papeete announcing that there would be a cinema show that evening at half past eight.

"I'll go back and get Taria," he had thought, "it will be a nice surprise for her," and with a slow swinging stride he sauntered through the maze of grass-grown, flower-hung paths that lie behind the main streets of the little town. It was a small enough shack, his bungalow; one large room furnished with a vast iron bedstead, a minute kitchen and a verandah running round it, but it sufficed for the needs of Taria and himself. Joe was a simple person of simple needs, well satisfied with the two hundred francs that he managed to pick up every week in tips and wages at the General Garage. And indeed in that setting such a bungalow was amply adequate. What more

should a man want but a verandah with mats to lie along when the warm air about him is scented with the thick sweet perfume of the tiare, what more indeed with the indolent, friendly Taria at his side, a glass of rum punch in his hand, and a companion or two to strum upon the ukulele. The scent of flowers, love-making, the warmth of wine; the rich soft voices, the melting Polynesian songs. What more could one ask of Providence on a Tahitian night? It was with a full and happy heart that Joe called out to Taria from the verandah steps.

To his surprise, however, Taria, whose sole complaint was the restricted number of cinemas and motor drives that his weekly earnings brought her, did not welcome the idea. She appeared worried and ill-at-ease, as she came out on to the verandah, her long black hair dishevelled and a pareo caught loosely beneath her arms.

"I'm sorry, Joe," she said, "but I'm tired, I'm not feeling well, I've been to bed."

Joe looked at her with surprise, irritation and suspicion. The only occasions on which he had known Taria decline a motor drive or a cinema ticket had been those that had followed an alcoholic afternoon in the Mariposa Café.

"You shouldn't go out with girls like Petua," he said. "It's bad for you, and it wastes money."

"But I haven't been out with Petua."

"Then whom have you been out with?"

"With nobody."

"Then what are you feeling ill about?" For Joe's mentality was incapable of recognising, in the young, any other cause of sickness.

"You don't mean to say," he said, "that you've been

sitting here and drinking rum all by yourself?" But Taria was not going to argue.

"You can think what you like," she said, "I'm feeling ill. I haven't been drinking. I'm not going to a cinema, I'm going back to bed," and turning round she shuffled back into the bed-room.

"Well," thought Joe surlily, "well."

By Taria's illness in itself he was not in the least disturbed. His annoyance over the incident was confined entirely to himself. He ought to have had a jolly evening, and because Taria had been a silly idiot and got ill his evening had been spoilt. On that account he felt angry with Taria. Girls had no right to be ill and spoil a fellow's fun. He had not been so angry with her since the night she had gone out with Petua and a couple of Australian tourists to return at daybreak hilarious and incapable. He had not been jealous. Jealousy is not a Polynesian characteristic, but he had felt aggrieved, definitely aggrieved. If there was any fun going he should have his share of it. It was in much the same spirit that he felt cheated now. He was aggrieved, angry and resentful.

"Well, anyway," he said, "I'm not going to have my fun interfered with. If she won't come with me I'll go myself," and walking into the kitchen he picked up the coat that was hanging from a nail upon the wall, and walked out of the bungalow towards the town.

It was a warm, moonless, but unclouded night, and along the road a stream of people were strolling in negligent chattering groups under the arched avenue of the flamboyants towards the cinema. The show would not

be starting for a half hour yet, and many of the tables at the Mariposa Café were occupied.

Surlily Joe took his place at one of them and ordered himself a gin fizz. He drank it, cold though it was, in two long gulps, and as the last drops trickled over his tongue he felt better disposed towards the world.

From across the room a chauffeur from the Bambridge Garage called to him.

"What are you doing all by yourself there, Joe?" he shouted. "Come over here and talk to us."

Joe responded willingly.

"I'll just settle up for this," he said, "then I'll come." And he put his hand into the vest pocket where he kept his little wad of notes, picked out one and tossed it on to the table. The girl laughed at him.

"You're very rich all of a sudden," she said.

"Rich? What do you mean?"

His eye followed her pointing finger. At first he could not believe what he was seeing, for there beside his glass was lying not the pink five franc note he looked for, but a large elaborately designed piece of paper with the figures 500 trailed across it. Stupidly he gazed at it.

"What's that doing there?" he asked.

"It's come out of your pocket, Joe," she said.

"Out of my pocket?" he repeated. "There's never been such a thing as that in my pocket since . . ." But he could not tell how long it was since he had had a five hundred franc note in his possession. A hundred franc note was so unusual a possession as to keep him awake at nights for fear of its safe custody.

"Out of my pocket," he repeated stupidly. "It couldn't have." And slipping back his hand into his pocket he drew out the wad of notes that he had felt for, and tossed it on to the table.

At first he thought a miracle must have happened. For there on the table between the girl and himself was not the little crumpled roll that he expected, but a stiff wad of notes, some dozen of them, and all of them for five hundred francs. He stared stupidly, dazedly. It could be nothing but a miracle. He looked first at the notes, then marvelling at the coat that had suddenly become the receptacle of such startling wealth. "How this old coat," he thought; then paused, looking more closely at the coat. . . . The familiar coat he had worn for so many weeks? But this was not brown rough holland that he was touching. It was silk, the kind of silk that you paid six hundred francs for at Ah Ying's, the kind of coat in which you would expect to find stiff wads of crinkling notes. This was not his money, this was not his coat; and yet it was the coat that he had found hanging in his bungalow. The mind of Joe worked extremely slowly. The conclusion to which a cockney would have leaped instantaneously was reached only by a slow process of deductions. One by one he surveyed the facts.

Taria's worriedness, her refusal to come out with him, her dishevelled hair, her plea of illness although she had not been out with Petua, the coat hanging upon the nail. Slowly he arrived at the unavoidable conclusion. "So that's," he thought, "why she wouldn't come out with me. She had another man there with her." His anger almost stifled him. It was worse than that trip with Petua and

the two Australians; it really was too much. There were limits to what a man could stand.

In a state of the liveliest fury he strode across the room to his friend from the Bambridge Garage.

"What do you think of this?" he said, and he proceeded to tell his story.

"There was I," he said, "given an evening off, coming home thinking I'ld have a nice evening at the cinema, then being let down like that. My word, but she'll be sorry for herself when I get back."

The Bambridge man nodded his head sympathetically.

"Pretty rotten," he said, "and you've no idea who the other man was?"

Joe shook his head. He did not care who the other man was. It was enough there had been another man, a man who had spoilt his evening, who had interfered with his amusement, who had stopped his girl going to the pictures with him; the sense of injustice done to him was so great that he felt he must confide his trouble to every one.

"Hi!" he shouted to a couple of sailors from the *Andromede*. "You come over here. I know you've come in to see if you can't persuade Paula to go out for a ride with you. But if what I've got to tell you doesn't cure you of women for the rest of your life you're bigger fools even than I was an hour ago." They came across.

And when people have come across to your table you must give them drinks. He called for a rum punch. "Make it strong," he added and flung a five hundred franc bill lordlily on to the table. The rum punch was brought; it was cool and it was strong, the warmth of his eloquence

and the warmth of the alcohol stormed heavily the ramparts of his reserve.

"Women," he said, "you work all day for them, you spend half your nights sitting in a wretched garage so that they can have an easy time and nice clothes, and when you come back and think you'll have a jolly evening you find them with another man."

It was said so loudly that nobody in the café could have failed to overhear it; and he proceeded so vociferously to announce his grievances that soon all conversation had ceased at the other tables. "What's the matter?" people were whispering one to another. "What's the matter with old Joe?"; while the more curious moved over to his table, were peering over his shoulder, were listening and chuckling, and beckoning to their friends to come across.

Soon there was quite a group round the burly half-caste.

"Women," he was saying, "women—" But his friend from the Bambridge Garage patted him gently on the shoulder.

"What are you worrying about women for," he said, "you've got your pals here and you've got good drink."

"Ah, yes, drink, you've always that. Whatever women may do they can't take that from us. Drink!" he shouted, and banged his fist loudly and authoritatively on the table. The row was so great that Gustave, the hotel proprietor, a vast genial but hard-muscled Samoan had been fetched from his own part of the house.

"Now, what's all this? What's all the trouble, Joe?"

"Trouble?" Joe answered. "What the trouble always is, women, old son, women."

"If that's what you are after—"

"It isn't what I'm after. I'm through with that. When I get home Taria's going to find herself landed down the verandah steps with every frock I've bought her piled on top of her. Women, I'm through with them. There'll never be another woman coming up those verandah steps. I'm through with women as every wise man is. It's drink I want. Bring us some, lots of it."

Gustave hesitated. It would be mail day to-morrow. He did not want a rough house and half his tables and most of his crockery broken. He had a good mind to bundle the whole lot into the street; but the story of the five hundred franc note had reached him; five hundred francs, after all, took a lot of taking. They all seemed peaceable enough; it would be at Joe's bungalow, not here, that the rough house would be taking place. There would probably be no harm done, so he smiled friendlily and expansively.

"Drink," he said. "Why, certainly, who for?"

Joe spread out his hands.

"For all of us, of course, why every one." His voice resounded through the room; and all those who had been hesitating at their corner tables hurriedly took leave of them. "This is too good a thing to be missed," they said.

"The whole lot of them," shouted Joe. "Take their orders, Gustave, give them what they like. What will you have, Freddie?"

Freddie had the reputation of being the Papeete wit.

"I don't know about you others," he said, "but I think I'ld like a little champagne myself."

There was a roar of laughter at that, a roar that to Joe

seemed almost like a challenge, a challenge that he must take up.

"Well, and why shouldn't we," he said, "why shouldn't we have champagne. There's nothing like champagne. Champagne, Gustave! And lots of it," and he tossed a couple of notes across the table.

It was at this point that I came into the Mariposa.

They will tell, those who knew the Tahiti of twenty years ago, that with the death of Lovaina gaiety departed from the little island. But they will also tell you, those who have lived in Papeete for forty years, that never has that night known an equal for uproarious, hilarious merriment. Never has champagne flowed so freely down more welcoming throats. Before the first bottle had been emptied Joe was standing upon the table addressing a variegated crowd, some white, some half-caste, some full Tahitian.

"Drink," he was saying, "there's nothing like it. Drink and friends, that's all a man's got time for. Women, they let you down. You work for them and you slave for them and yet when you want to take them to the cinema . . . I tell you that when I get back to Taria . . . Well, I tell you . . ."

But though he described her punishment with a fertility of imagination that would have delighted the Marquis de Sade, it was no longer venomously that he spoke of her. He was far too happy to feel venomous about any one. It was the greatest evening of his life. The times when he had drunk champagne could be numbered upon the fingers of his hand. Rum punch had been the limit of his hospitality. He was a simple chauffeur of whom no one

had ever taken any notice, who had never sat at a table with American and English tourists, and yet here he was drinking champagne, his own champagne, standing drinks not only to his friends, but people whom he was unconscious of ever having met before.

He was being toasted. White men were shaking him by the hand, white women were saying, "But really, isn't he the sweetest thing?" For three hours he was the centre of attention, interest, affection even. It was an intoxication more potent than the champagne that he was drinking; the kind of intoxication that may come once but never twice in a man's life, the intoxication that Napoleon knew at Austerlitz, that Disraeli knew when he routed Gladstone, that turned Siki's head when Carpentier was struggling on the boards.

"Good old Joe!" people were saying. "Your health again, Joe! Good old Joe!" Of that crisp wad of notes not a brass franc remained when three hours later Joe staggered out into the cool air. He was very drunk, but he was very happy, and "Now for Taria," he shouted.

Since the discovery of the lost coat Taria had endured miseries of apprehension. Would he find out, she wondered, and if he found out would he understand, and if he understood what would he do?

Ought she to run, she asked herself, ought she to go to the police? Should she get some friends round her to protect her? Ought she to go in search of Joe? One by one the various alternatives were turned over in her mind, were weighed, considered and discarded. "What shall I do?" she thought, "what shall I do?" In the end she did what at all the important crises of her life she did do, she did

nothing. She just lay, an indolent and apprehensive creature along the mat of her verandah.

For three hours she lay there, then at the end of the avenue she heard loudening the swell of noise. There was singing and there was shouting, some forty or fifty people at least there must be; and through and above the din she could hear Joe's voice, a thick and muffled voice that seemed to be calling out her name.

Then indeed did terror settle on her.

"He's going to kill me," she thought, and she looked wildly, despairingly around the bungalow in search of something with which to protect herself. "But if I do I'll only madden him," she thought. "I'd better stay quiet, or should I run? What should I do?" As always, she did nothing. And indeed there would have been little chance of her doing anything for from all sides the shouting hilarious throng, were swarming round the bungalow, and Joe, on staggering feet, was being led towards her.

As he began to sway up the verandah steps she almost shrieked with terror. It was with an enormous effort that she stretched out her hands to him and called "Joe" softly.

One glance at him, however, showed her there was little need for terror. To her astonishment there was no anger, no hatred, no revenge on that large brown thick-lipped face. He was smiling at her fondly, almost gratefully. He came across to her, patted her on the shoulder, and put an arm about her waist. He was very drunk, but he was very happy. This had been the great evening of his life, and vaguely he seemed to realise that it was to do with Taria that this great evening had come to him; and that had there been no Taria there would have been no

happiness. He did not quite know how it had come about, there had been a coat: but he could not remember, it had happened so long ago, it was very confused and very dim; he was aware vaguely that he should feel grateful to Taria, and his fingers pressed affectionately about her waist. With the other hand he waved genially to us.

"Good night, you fellows!" he said, "good night."

"Good night, Joe!" we shouted back at him; and one of us called three cheers for him, and the cheers resounded through the tropical night, and Joe was so happy that he was almost crying. He felt he ought to do something, that he ought to return thanks in some way. He should make a speech. But he could think of nothing to say. He only felt that somebody should be thanked, and he could think of no one to be thanked but Taria, so he patted her shoulder and waved his hand and,

"We'll have one last cheer!" he cried. "Three cheers for Taria!"

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PENANG

VI

A CERTAIN novelist was asked at the end of a three weeks' stay in Jamaica whether he had found many plots there. "Plots," he answered, "why, I've not struck the trail of even one liaison."

The story was told to me with an amused twinkle of the eye. "We must all be cleverer than we had thought if he took away that impression," the twinkle said. But if that novelist had been deceived, well, so had I. From every British colony and possession that I have visited: from Egypt, from the West Indian islands, from the Far East I have taken away a precisely similar impression.

I stayed longer in Penang than in any other English settlement, and at the end of my stay I had come to the conclusion that life there was so constituted that in order to carry on a liaison one would have to be so blatant that

every one would know about it, or rely on chance opportunities that would be so infrequent as to make it scarcely an affair at all. And to be blatant is the one thing you cannot be in an English community. The English attitude may be summed up in a phrase that H. G. Wells in "The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman" puts into the mouth of a solicitor—"A row's a row and damned disgraceful." In England you can do anything you like, provided you are discreet. The English will keep their eyes shut as long as they possibly can. They know that the moment their eyes are opened they will have to take combined official notice. It is to this national characteristic that Latins refer when they speak of "British hypocrisy." In a Latin community you may do anything you like provided everybody knows what you are doing. In an English community life is arranged on the assumption that every one has a right to a private life; that that private life must not be interfered with; but that the moment that private life is staged in public, protest must be made. In England, as the result of that attitude, life is arranged more personally and more satisfactorily than in any country I know. But in a community where there are no doors to lock, where every one knows what every one is supposed to be doing at any hour of the day, it is impossible to lead a private life. To conduct an organised intrigue would be in that setting, I should think, impossible. The novelist will have to put a heavy strain upon his capacities for invention if he is going to stage-manage the eternal triangle in Malaya. Yet at the same time, paradoxically enough, I know of no place where circumstance presents a woman with more insidious temptation.

At the start her life there has the quality of a dream.

The men who settle in the Far East leave home before they have taken root in adult life. By the time their second leave comes round they have broken the majority of such ties as they had in England: so that their marriages are as often as not the outcome of some holiday encounter. Invariably theirs are rushed wooings.

For the woman the whole setting is romantic. A stranger invading the self-contained atmosphere in which she has spent her entire life, falling in love with her at first sight, telling her so the third time he has met her, refusing to listen to a refusal. The relief of meeting a man like that; a man who knows his mind, who can make up hers for her. The relief after the timid, irresolute young men who played tennis and danced and flirted with her, and were so desperately anxious not to commit themselves too far! It is like a fairy tale, this strong stranger swooping down to take her away from all of them for ever. And there is the fun of saying to her friends: "Yes, we've only known each other ten days, but we're going to be married at once. I'm going back with him when his leave's over." And to watch the look of wondering envy creep into their eyes.

Then there is the excitement of the East. She will have no idea what it is going to be like. She will be utterly unprepared for the beauty of Penang. She has pictured it, probably, in terms of a Kipling story, a place of dust and heat, like a vast parched barrack square. At Ceylon, when they drive out from Colombo to Mount Lavinia through that astounding opulence of greenery, she can scarcely believe that it is real.

"Will Penang be anything like this?" she gasps.

Her husband laughs at her enthusiasm.

"They say, those who've been round the world many times, that Penang makes even Samoa seem a little shoddy."

And later, years later, there will still remain something of that wonderment with which she drove for the first time from the station to their house. It is so lovely: the wide road with the large open verandahed houses, the rickshaws and the coolies, and the thronged streets of the Chinese quarter; the shouting and the colour and the golden-lettered signs above the doors. She will come to love every foot of Georgetown. Her house will be a complete surprise to her. She, who has been accustomed, probably, to the small villa of restricted incomes, who only in her most remote dreams has been able to picture herself as the mistress of anything but a similar small villa, finds herself suddenly the mistress of a wide-roomed house, with a large garden and an array of servants; she has only to lie back in her chair and call out "Boy!" to find a swift and silent servitor beside her. She is suddenly a person of importance. A man has reached a position of influence in Malaya before he can afford to marry. As the wife of such a one, she is treated with a deference for which nothing in her life previously has prepared her.

The life of the place attracts her. The lazy mornings, the few orders to be given to the servants, then the hour or two of reading and writing letters, as a prelude to the drive down to Pritchard's and the exchange of gossip with her friends over a lime squash, till the time comes to drive back for tiffin, picking up her husband on the way. And after tiffin there is the siesta, to be followed by the refresh-

ing splash of an ice-cold dipper, and the waking, clear-eyed and fresh, to the exquisitely cooling hour before sundown when one plays golf or tennis, or drives out to the bathing pool. And afterwards there are the *pahit* parties that as often as not do not break up till close on ten. Her first two years there are the happiest she has ever known.

Then slowly the process of lassitude begins.

There are so many factors that go to the framing of it. The heat, the laziness, the absence of variety, the constant presence of the same people round her, the same topics of conversation, golf tournaments, tennis tournaments, the price of rubber, the price of copra, the price of tin; the knowledge that each day will repeat precisely the details of every day, of every week, of every month that has preceded them; just as those clear sunlit tropical weeks follow each other in unvarying sequence. In England, every morning brings its own mood. You are glad, happy, disappointed, cheered in response to the warmth or greyness of the sky. There is a pendulum swinging between two extremes, but the Far East repeats day after day the same effects. There is no variety; you yearn for something new.

And it is just when this mood of boredom is at its height that there comes crowningly the leave to which she has so eagerly looked forward, to which through many hot siestas and wakeful nights she has counted and recounted the days and hours. The leave that is as likely as not profoundly to disenchant her; to astonish even more than disenchant.

She has left home a pretty and much sought-after girl. In Penang, as a young bride, in a town where there are

ten young men to every girl, she has been surrounded with invitations to golf and swimming. At the dances at country clubs her programme has been filled up the day before. Wherever she has gone she has been courted and made much of. On her return home, however, she finds that girls who were still at school when she went away, are now the centre of male attraction. She is no longer the first person to be thought of when any party is made up. Her breakfast tray is no longer littered with invitations. For hours on end her telephone bell is silent. She has become the wife of a middle-aged man from the Colonies who prefers bridge to dancing, and is uninterested in late hours. It is to the quiet and middle-aged, rather than to the young and boisterous parties that she finds herself invited. In one stride she seems to have passed out of youth to middle age.

During that leave she finds herself looking at her husband with new eyes. He is no longer the white knight of romance riding down to rescue her. The tropics have begun to take their toll of him. He has been twenty years there in that humid, enervating heat; twenty years of work in a climate where a white man was not meant to work; twenty years of *stengahs* and gin *pahits* in a climate where alcohol before sundown is a poison. Resentfully she looks at the tall, stooping broad-shouldered figure, whose strength is losing itself in fatness; at the red, full-cheeked profile, with its jaw line submerged in fat; at the pouches puckering beneath the eyes. He is getting old, she tells herself. And because he is getting old, he thinks of her as old. "Which I'm not," she tells herself. "I'm not. I'm not."

It is despairingly, however, that she insists. It is not only of her husband that she has taken stock. She has looked in her own glass, too, and looking there has seen that in very truth she is no longer the fresh and vivid girl of twenty-seven who, five years earlier, had waved good-bye to her friends from the deck of the *Kaeyan*. Four years in the tropics are the equivalent of ten years in Europe. She is no longer a girl, but a youngish woman. "Is it all over?" she tells herself. Is nothing exciting ever going to happen to her again?

She is in the very mood, in fact, to welcome and encourage on her return the warm-eyed admiration of some younger man.

I should doubt if there are many married women in the Far East who have not at some point of their lives found themselves swept off their feet by some new attraction. And for practically every one of them, the course of that attraction must have been similar.

To begin with, there is the thrill of a new adventure: the shynesses, the confidences, the admissions, the uncertainties, the half-said things: the sense of life rebudding. And with that sense a new meaning, a new pleasure in every aspect of her life. Each morning she wakes to a foreknowledge of delight. How ridiculous it was of her to have found life dull. The eyes are bright that look back at her from the mirror. How absurd it was of her to have talked about being old. The whole day is coloured with anticipation. "In six hours," she thinks as she drives down to Pritchard's, "I shall be seeing him." She counts the minutes as they pass. Sometimes she is so excited that she cannot sleep during the hour of siesta, but tosses from side to side, thinking

of the moment when she will walk into the club to meet in those grey-brown eyes the start of surprised delight, that look of seeming to see her for the first time.

She knows that she will see him. That is the advantage of living in a small community. You can always be certain of seeing the people that you want. Every night before they part he asks her what she will be doing on the following evening. "I'm going to such and such a *pahit* party," she will say. "Then I think I'll get myself invited to it," he'll reply. Or else: "Nothing in particular," she'll answer. "Then probably we'll be meeting here," he'll say. And wherever it is they meet, at a *pahit* party or at the golf club, there will be in their eyes as they meet across a crowded room the same eager look of recognition: that sense of homecoming: that feeling that but for themselves the room is empty. They will know, as they chatter inconsequently to other people of indifferent things, that they are waiting each of them for the moment when they will slip away from those unimportant people. Sometimes in the same way that children will leave their favourite sweet till last, they delay that moment: so that the relish will be the deeper when they can say, "At last!"

The things that they will talk of will be much the same as those that they have discussed with those other indifferent people. They will talk of mutual friends, of the tennis tournament, of restriction, of the news in the London papers. But the things will sound different so that when he will say: "I have always felt that way, have you?" they will feel that another link has been forged between them, and afterwards when they have separated, he to the club and she to the brief rushed dinner, they will feel

tranquillised; in harmony with the beauty of the night; silent, and in need of solitude. That, in the early days, is how it is.

It is not till later, with love avowed, that the strain of a situation intrinsically impossible will be imposed on them. Then will begin the desperate series of pleadings and persuasions; the whisperings in corners; the half moments snatched at greedily; the fear of detection, the sense of shame, the gradual wearing away of nerves; the irritations; the impracticability of ever being alone; the half-adjusted quarrels; his reiterated, "But surely, somehow it can be managed!" Her impotently shrugged away reply, "But, darling, you must see, how can I?" And so it must run its course: to end, as often as not, in a few hurriedly snatched kisses that will have in their desperate sense of incompleteness a savour that no other kisses can have. That, nine in ten times, is the way that things will go.

It is only rarely that some real moment of solitude can be arranged, that they will be able, for example, to plan that he shall take a week's leave in Singapore, at the same time that she is there for a week's rest and shopping. Then for certain hours they will be alone. But even over that, over "the little grace of an hour," will hang a feeling of frustration.

§

As the little boat plies its way along the coast towards Port Sweetenham she will lie back moodily in her arm chair looking out over the brown waters to the green and friendly coastline, the bending palm trees and the yellow sand, watching the sun grow larger and more red as it

sinks into the horizon, until at the final second before it drowning the last protruding rim turns to a brilliant emerald. It is lovely, beyond speech lovely. It seems to contain the key to heart's desire. Which is the paradox, the cruel paradox, of Eastern life. The warmth, the luxuriance, the almost unbelievable beauty of its nights may weave the ideal setting for romance, but the conditions of life make it impossible for forbidden love to be anything but strained, subterranean and squalid. This big adventure of her life—that was how she had excused it to herself—what is it going to be but a furtive, squalid deceiving behind their backs of people who had trusted her? There can be no freedom for her there. During the whole of her stay in Singapore she will be unable to see her lover openly. All day long she will have to arrange her alibis, going out with other friends, shopping, swimming, golfing, leading the typical life of the white woman in the East. They may talk of this excursion as a honeymoon, but there will be no opportunities for a happy, easy comradeship; no jolly sharing of simple pleasures; just the dark stealing at night down a hotel corridor.

It is with a feeling of intolerable lassitude that a week later she will return to Georgetown. The thing is done, an episode is closed. It will be impossible for them to arrange a further similar expedition. Once the fact that they should be both away at the same time may be explained. But twice it cannot be. And there in Penang is the same life waiting her. The same routine of Pritchard's, tiffin, siesta, *pahit* party. It is just as it was fifteen months ago. There is no thrill of anticipation, nothing to be looked forward to. There is still as she comes into the

room that quick turning of the head. But there is nothing to be said now when the moment comes for them to say, "At last!" In earlier days each exchanged confidence was the forging of a chain and later there were the hot-blooded pleadings, the prayers, the protestations, the eager dreamings of that longed-for meeting: the beseeched, "Ah, how I count the hours to it!" But now that that hour has been reached and passed, there is nothing to be shared but memories. Things work to a point, then work away from it. There is a valedictory quality to their talk. With her head turned sideways, she listens wearily to his protestations. How he loves her, how he will always love her. How by her loving of him, she has spoilt all other women for him. Impatiently she listens. Their past and his future, what do they matter to her? Her impatience is marked so deeply in the furrowed cleft between her brows that he cannot help noticing it. He breaks off his protestations. "Darling, you look so sad. You're not regretting it?" She shrugs her shoulders. Regret it? What answer is there to be made to that, other than one's invariable answer at every crossing of the ways? If she hadn't done it, she would probably regret that more.

SIAM

VII

RIGHT through Malaya the love-life of a man is strained and unsatisfactory until he marries. Usually he does marry the moment he can afford to. In Penang the situation is direct. But northwards a thousand miles or so in the teak forests of North Siam it is very different. In those far places the white man is still the pioneer: beset with the problems and trials of the pioneer. It is in a series of snapshots that I see his life.

I hear the soft fearful whisper of his native servant. "Can I get nothing for the master: a little soup?"

Wearily the young man shakes his head. There is nothing to be done; when malaria has its hold on you there never is anything to be done but dose yourself with quinine, lie out on a long chair wrapped round with blankets, and wait for the long healing flood of sweat into which

ultimately this shivering ague will dissolve. There is nothing to be done. But the brown figure remains motionless beside him, an expression of pained anxiety in his soft brown eyes.

"The master is very sick," he says. "Should not the master be moved back to station?"

Again the head is shaken. To go sick; to be taken back to Chiengmai, on a stretcher; to be sent home on leave and while back there to be told that the directors much regretted that they did not consider he had the constitution to withstand so testing, so difficult a climate. No, no . . . too many of the white men who have come to the jungle country have flung in their hands. How many lasted the full course? one in ten perhaps. Of the dozen or so fellows who have come to the teak forests in the first year after the War, there are besides himself only two still working in North Siam. The others have gone back, one by one. One by one the jungle had beaten them.

The survival of the fittest. That was what they had told him when he signed on in London. And he had pictured as the long black- and buff-coloured liner ploughed its way eastwards through the cooled and tossing waters of the monsoon, such a life of romantic danger as the word "jungle" wakes in the half-envious, half-reluctant imaginings of Western peoples; a life of wild animals and savage natives, of plundering and poison and raids by night. That is what he had taken them to mean when they had spoken in the Kinsway offices of the Singapore Timber Company, of the survival of the fittest.

But it had not been like that.

It was not against tangible enemies that you fought.

There were cobra of course in plenty, and the tracks round your tent of bear and panther. And now and again a coolie would run *amok*, scattering terror through a diminished district. But those were not the enemies you fought. It was not cobra nor panther nor wild-eyed native that had sent Giles and Faversham and the others shivering home. It had been the loneliness; the sequence of sun-drenched weeks with never a white man to speak to; it had been the discomfort, the itch of prickly heat, the leeches, the mosquitoes, and the mud-sores; the sandflies that no netting could keep out; the red ants that night after night made sleep impossible; it had been the long depression of the September rains when bedding and kit were soaked and for days on end it would be impossible to wear dry clothing; it had been the fever which took its toll, slowly, spasm by spasm, of your vitality and courage. Those were the enemies you fought.

Through strained and streaming eyes he can see from the verandah of his bungalow, across the brown waters of the Menam down which the logs were drifting on their slow five years' journey towards Bangkok, the towering splendour of the jungle. There it stands, lovely and cool and green in the mild October sunlight. And lying there he recalls the gasp of wonder with which he had for the first time seen it. It was so beautiful. You could not believe that anything so beautiful could be so full of poison, that those green recesses concealed not peace and quiet but disease and misery and decay; that the very depths of that luxuriant greenery betrayed the malice of its heart, that the measure of its beauty was the measure of its hate, that the very creepers that festooned the trees,

heightening their grandeur, making them lovelier than any trees of the West could be, were in fact slowly crushing them to death, eating away their strength, replenished with it, as the fever that fed upon his youth.

"Is there nothing that I can get the master?" the boy repeats.

No, no, there is nothing to be got, nothing to be done. He must just hang on as he has done before, hang on and wait for the healing release of sweat. It might be that he was really ill; it might be that his staying was a risk. But the risk of going back to Chiengmai was even greater. There was always the chance that they might class him as "unfit." And it was not as though it were for himself alone that he were fighting. If it were, he might have run the risk of being carried back to the station on a stretcher. But there is another to be considered. And as at those other moments when he has felt his resolution weakening, he clings as priests will to the emblems of their faith, to the memory of the small pleading face that had been lifted piteously with lips that trembled as his train four years ago had drawn slowly from the station. "Darling," she had whispered, "it'll be all right. I know it will."

He had met her during a leave from France in the early summer of 1918, and in its circumstance and setting it had been a conventional enough courtship. A country house, the unworldly beauty of an English spring, a girl who seemed the embodiment of spring. Their combined appeal was irresistible to one who had known for six months the monotony and dreary horror of modern war. While she, who had only six weeks earlier put up her hair, was meeting a man on an equality almost for the first time, was

seeing for the first time in a man's eyes the light of fervour. Within five days of meeting, they had become engaged. Golden, halcyon, unfretted days. But though at this time there had been raised little enough opposition to their engagement, they were to find the moment the War was over, conditions drastically reversed. He, instead of being a Captain in the Loamshires, with a position of importance, and pay in plenty to be spent on leave, was now one of many thousand young men in the middle twenties, without a job, and without any training for a job, in a world that was speedily forgetting its promises now that the need for displaying gratitude had passed. For six weeks casually, then for two months feverishly, he ransacked London for any job that would both support him and hold out the prospect of advancement. By the end of those fourteen weeks his gratuity was practically consumed.

"And have you no immediate plans?" her father had begun to ask him.

Dismally he shook his head. No, he had no plans; he would accept any reasonable job that was offered. But he did not after four years' fighting propose to commit himself for life to an occupation that promised nothing but a prolonged battle against penury.

Her father pursed his lips. "Quite, quite," he said. "I sympathise with you entirely. But at the same time, while your future is so uncertain, I cannot help feeling that the position is a little unfair to Dorothy."

He received the blow unflinchingly. It was only what he had been expecting for some while past. One thing alone in that request concerned him.

"Has Dorothy asked you to say this?" he asked.

And the assurance that such an idea had never occurred to her was the one incident in those three months that had not been a blow to his self-confidence.

"Very well," he said, "if I can't get anything within ten days, I'll clear."

Desperately he began his search. But though he was desperate he kept his head. On one point he was decided. It was no good looking for a job in England. His country, now that the War was over, had no use for him. He had thought when the last shot was fired over the Flanders fields that he was coming home for good. But apparently that last shot was only to be the signal for another wandering. Within a week he had signed his contract with the Singapore Timber Company.

Dorothy was breathlessly excited when he told her.

"D-darling, it'll be like a picnic. Siam, and the jungle, and camping out. I'll love it. Do come back quick to take me out there. And while you're away I'll write to you every week, oh, such terribly long letters."

She has kept her word. Those treasured letters that have been brought to him across rivers and through mud have never degenerated into brief and impersonal bulletins of facts. They have been coloured and vivid like herself, an eager description and commentary of the life she led, the care-free happy life of the London that had abandoned itself to pleasure. She was dining here and dancing there, she had been to this play and to that, met this and the other person. But all the time, in spite of the ceaseless variety and movement of that world, her need of him has never lessened. "If you were here it would be perfect, but as it is, there's always the chief thing missing."

And now in a few weeks he will be returning to her. He has reached a position on which it would be amply possible to marry. There remains nothing beyond obtaining the manager's permission. That he knows will not be easy. For the assistants in the Singapore Timber Company are allowed to marry only with the approval of authority. And Carrington, his manager, had never given such leave readily. He prefers his assistants to be undistracted. In the days when he had himself come out, twenty-five years back, when there was no railway line and the journey by boat from Bangkok took upwards of seven weeks, there had been scarcely a white woman in Chiengmai; and Carrington, who had followed the custom of the country, maintaining and after the birth of their child marrying a Lao woman, was unsympathetic to the new conditions that not only had simplified but encouraged a European marriage. Carrington was one of the finest men that the teak country had ever known. There would be no one, brown or white, who would not regret his retirement when it came. But he was as hard as he was just. And although between his assistant and himself there existed, despite the disparity of age, a relationship of mutual and very genuine respect, the younger man was by no means looking forward to the interview which would be taking place a week or so later during one of Carrington's periodic visits to the workings.

"Whatever happens," he feels, "I must be fit when he comes up. He mustn't think me a weakling whom he could do just as well without."

So he hangs on, shivering between the weight of blankets, on the long canvas chair. Lies there, hanging on,

gazing with tired eyes over the little compound, so calm and placid in the amber sunlight, listening with tired ears to the soft tinkle of the cowbells, and the murmur of hidden life that quivered about the jungle's edge.

§

A little weak, a little shaken, but with eyes that shine resolutely behind their dark-rimmed lids, he follows a few days later at Carrington's side, the inspection of some recent fillings.

"You're not looking well," said Carrington. "Anything the matter?"

He shrugged the inquiry aside, "Nothing much, a touch of fever. It was over in an hour or so."

Doubtfully Carrington shook his head. "You must be careful, you know." He is tall, sunburnt, bearded; rough of voice, and rough of manner.

"Must be careful," he repeats. "Won't do to have you crocking yourself up. Can't afford to lose the only man we've had out here since the War worth anything. And with my post falling vacant soon, I don't know what we shall do if you're not here to take it up."

He speaks gruffly, in the off-hand way that is his manner, but his words send the blood pounding triumphantly through Arbutt's veins.

"What, me manager?" he cried.

"Who else should be?"

"Merivale?"

"Merivale's not coming back."

"What?"

The news came as a complete surprise. Merivale, who was the only one of the immediately post-war crowd to stand the strain of the first Chukka, was three months his senior. And he had often ruefully reflected that those three months would stand permanently in the way of his own promotion. Carrington's next remark flung, however, a cloud over his excitement.

"He wrote last week," Carrington explained, "to ask if he could bring a wife with him. And I told him that Bangkok, not Chiengmai, was the place for timber men with wives. It's no use," he added, "I've seen too much. You can't take a white woman up into the jungle, and a married man's worrying the whole time to get back to station. It just won't do."

To the young man those words are like the passing of a sentence on himself, so that in spite of his own interests he felt himself forced to plead Merivale's case for him.

"You can't blame him," he says. "It's a lonely life."

"Blame him? Good heavens, no. Loneliness. I understand that all right."

Who indeed understood it better? What else had it been but loneliness that had driven him twenty years back on the return from his first leave to follow the country's custom and take into his house the little Lao girl that one evening his boy had brought to him. Loneliness, it had been no more than that; the need for comradeship, for the feeling that one belonged to some one, for a house made ready for him when he came out of the jungle. They might talk, the folk in England, about the vicious East, but in point of fact women played a very insignificant part in one's life east of Suez. One was lonely. One

wanted comfort. Later one became indifferent. It was indifference, that and no more than that, which had let him marry his Lao woman after their baby's birth. It would make things simpler. England was no more than a memory to him. Loneliness; he knew the geography of that road all right.

But he had lived a hard life too long for sentiment.

"Can't have a thing both ways. Man's got to choose. No need, though, for you to grumble."

It is with a wry smile that the young man answers him.

"There wouldn't be if I hadn't been thinking of asking you pretty well the same thing myself."

"What, wanting to get married?"

"On my leave."

"'Um!" and Carrington purses his lips, scratching slowly at his shaggy beard. "I'm sorry," he says, "very, very sorry." And though the expression of those eyes was kindlier than his junior had ever seen it, again he felt that sentence was being passed on him.

"Nice of you," he murmurs wretchedly.

"What is?"

"Being sorry at losing me."

Carrington laughs at that. "Losing you? Who's talking about losing you?"

"What else, then, did you mean?"

Throwing back his head Carrington laughs noisily.

"Anything but that. Lose you? You're much too valuable. I'm only sorry, because it's such a tremendous risk."

But his assistant is in no mood at that moment to consider risks. This only he can grasp: that miraculously the

permission to marry has been granted him, and that it will be to the life of a manager's, not an assistant's, wife that he will be bringing Dorothy.

"Then I may?"

"If I'm not stopping you, who is?"

"In Merivale's case, though . . ."

"Merivale was different. Unmarried he was just good enough. Married he'ld have been under standard. But you . . . well, you can come to us on your own terms. No, no, don't start thanking me. You're a good man, and we want good men. We've no use for anything else. And the supply's running a bit thin just now.

"All the same," he adds after a pause, "it is a risk, a colossal risk. One's lonely and life needs sweetening, but it's not a place for more than one white woman in a thousand."

The young man is scarcely listening. In six weeks he will be going home. In six months he will be married. His eyes are dazzled so that the rice-fields are a blur below him and the hills beyond the golden crested teak are lost in the dark background of the jungle's foliage. Risks, what were risks, when one is under thirty? Besides, Dorothy is that one woman in a thousand.

§

"D-darling, oh, darling, darling!"

The instant they are alone together in the taxi, she has turned to him, her arms flung recklessly about his neck, her face lifted to a long and breathless kiss that redeems the hardships and the loneliness of two hundred weeks.

"It's too marvellous," she is whispering; "it's just as though you had never been away at all." Which is indeed what he had felt himself when he had seen her waiting at the platform barrier, unaltered for all that four years of changing fashion had intervened, from the girl who had murmured on that distant morning through piteously trembling lips: "Darling, it'll be all right. I know it will." She is the same brown-haired, brown-eyed Dorothy, with the laughing eyes and quick stammer in her voice. And she is in his arms and her cheek is against his, and because the moment is too tense for both of them, she is filling the hallowed interval with such trivial chatter as one might gabble over a telephone to the friend one has seen yesterday and is dining with to-night.

"We've arranged such a h-heavenly party," she is saying. "It would have been jollier to have been alone, of course, but if you will only give your friends five minutes' notice. . . . I've had this date fixed for weeks. So I rang up Janet, she's a perfect dear, you'll love her, and I said, 'G-gentleman friend, come back on leave,' and she said, 'Bring gentleman friend and find another girl to make the party square.' It's at the Berkeley at half-past eight, and afterwards we'll be going to the Clarion or perhaps the Carnival. I d-daresay the Carnival would be more amusing: the Clarion's getting dull. All these places do after they've been running a couple of months. And I do want it to be a jolly evening. Oh, Jimmie, d-dear, life's going to be such tremendous fun having you back an' all!"

She is what she had always been, the same breathless, light-hearted, buoyant Dorothy. There had been mo-

ments, dark moments over there, when he had wondered in spite of his faith in her, whether it might not be to a changed Dorothy that he would be returning. Letters told one so little, after all. And four years was a long time. She had been scarcely eighteen when he had said good-bye to her. Eighteen to twenty-two. Those irresponsible, those heady years, when a girl was coming out, finding her feet, the object from hour to hour of fresh influences and fresh impressions. Who could tell whither these tides and currents might not be taking her? But she is as unchanged as the London that she has cast mantlewise about her.

As he stands beside her that evening in the Berkeley lounge he has intoxicatingly the sensation which comes to most wanderers at times of never having been away. Minor changes there are, of course; the shingled instead of the bobbed hair, the wide billowing pannier skirts—a half step, who knew, to the crinoline. And men are wearing their trousers looser, and their sleeves tighter, and the wide-ended ties are new and the double-breasted waistcoats of the same pique as the shirts. But in its essence it is the old life unaltered. The glow, the glitter, the animation.

There are ten of them at the large round table in the room's far corner and the talk is flung backwards and forwards from mouth to mouth with the old care-free gaiety. The old talk too; of Lord's and Ranelagh and dances. There are new names, of course; new names drifting across their life, like the long grey logs down the brown waters of the Menam. The same talk, though, the same river.

"It's like a miracle," he murmurs as the lights around

the room are lowered, and with Dorothy pressed close against him he swings into the long rhythm of a valse. "I feel as though everything that had happened between now and my going was a blank; as though it were only yesterday I went."

In his arms and warm and nestling, Dorothy is laughing happily.

"And you're d-dancing, darling, just as one did then, with your knees bent horribly."

But there is no criticism, only happy comment in her reproof.

"You'll have to give me lessons."

"Lots and lots."

"We get awfully out of date with things out there."

"Still dancing 'the bells are ringing'?"

"When we dance at all."

"How do you mean?"

"There're not a great many partners to choose from in the jungle."

"There's Bangkok."

He laughs. "I didn't set foot in Bangkok between the day I arrived and the day I sailed."

Her eyebrows are raised incredulously.

"Then where do you d-dance?"

"Oh, just now and again in the station."

But it was not the hour to discuss Siam. After an interval of four years they are dancing again together: and it does not matter that his knees are bent in the manner of a dated summer. They are together. His hands are upon her shoulder, her hair close against his cheek. Through

their warmed veins is beating the valse's rhythm. Like a mist her powdered fragrance rises about them.

"And where are we going now?" she cries as they join the others at the table. "Oh, no," she protests as some one suggests that they might stop on a little longer. "We've been three hours here already. And three hours in one place, in one evening . . . really, Janet, I ask you! So which is it to be, the Carnival or the Clarion?"

"What about the Green Grotto?"

"There's a goodish cabaret at the Blue Bohemians."

"Personally, I'm for the Spanish Oven."

Eagerly but amicably for a few moments the rival claimants are contrasted. There is a good band at the Green Grotto, but the floor is ridiculously minute, and though the Clarion is pleasant enough with its ebony black floor and purple and gold hangings, and fountain playing dreamily in the lounge, one has been there so often. "We shall only be meeting the same lot," says Dorothy. And the Spanish Oven was too like an oven, while the Carnival . . .

In the end they decide on the Blue Bohemians. "For a while at any rate," is Dorothy's emendation, and there is the chartering of a fleet of taxis and at the end of a dark alley on the third floor of a suspicious structure they exchange a stack of Treasury notes for the privilege of ordering watered Chablis at five and six a glass, and dancing shoulder to shoulder on a slippery strip of oak measuring fifteen feet by ten. It is hot and crowded and uninspiring. The band is lifeless. The room is empty of celebrities.

"This is awful," murmurs Janet, at the end of thirty

minutes. "Whoever was it that suggested this mausoleum?"

"Three months ago," murmured apologetically the young diplomat who was responsible.

"Three months ago," it was retorted. "No place is worth anything after its first seven weeks."

"Can't bear any place," says Dorothy, "much more than once myself."

"Well, anyhow, let's go somewhere else."

So once again there is a scramble for cloaks and hats and once again there is a discussion with taxi-men on the brink of pavements.

"We want to go somewhere that we've never been to before."

"What about the Green Grotto?"

"Been there."

"Or the Spanish Oven."

"Know every inch of it."

"Or the Clarionette."

But they know the Clarionette and the Carnival and the Forty-nine.

"Well, Miss," says the taxi-driver, "there's still the Acme."

The Acme. There is a pause, while each in turn shifts the memory of protracted nights. The Acme? No, no one can remember it.

"Heavenly!" cries Dorothy. "I adore going to new places. New places and new people. They're the only things that make life worth living."

But as she speaks she leans lightly on her lover's arm, whispering in that silent pressure of those other things

that are of much greater matter. And in the taxi as they sit side by side she slips her hand softly into his.

"Happy, dearest?"

His fingers return her pressure, but in truth he is feeling, as the evening lengthens, more than a little breathless in this taut atmosphere of bustle. It is all rather too electric for one who has not seen altogether more than two-score Europeans during his four years' exile, and who is in the habit of travelling not in rattling taxi-cabs but in the wake of lumbering elephants. He is more than a little relieved when Dorothy cries in the doorway of a silk-hung, high-galleried basement hall: "Oh, but this is h-heavenly, Jimmy, heavenly," and still more relieved when the cabaret is at an end, when the blare of the saxophone has softened, when the room begins to empty, and for those that remain the hour had come for kippers and fried eggs and quiet talk. Happy and tired and drowsily content, they loll back against a low, right-angled, many-cushioned sofa, while the waiter clears the table of champagne and lays out the cloth for breakfast.

"And how," asks one of the men, "does this sort of thing compare with your Siamese variety?"

He laughs. "It does not compare at all. There's nothing to compare it with."

"No night clubs?"

"There are only thirty white people in the place."

"Thirty!" echoes Janet.

"Apart from the mission folk."

"Thirty," Janet repeats. "Then what on earth do you find to do?"

"Oh, well," and he pauses, wondering what indeed they

did find to do, or rather how he was to explain to these sophisticated townsfolk the essence of a world which has in truth, when you come to know it, an attraction for which you may search in vain through Europe.

"Come now," says the diplomat cheerfully. "Let's have a sketch of the jungle wallah's day."

"It would sound awfully dull. It would bore you blue."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't."

"Of course it wouldn't."

"We'll stop you if it does."

And one by one they begin to fire questions at him; questions that build up answer by answer a rough picture of that exile's world.

"And the women," asks Janet, "what do they do?"

"What women?"

"The men's wives, of course."

"They're not many of them married."

"But those who are."

"Oh, well, for the most part they stay in the station. Some of them go up to the jungle during the dry season, but it isn't fearfully comfortable. It isn't like India and Burma. There's less sleeping in bungalows than tents."

"And the ones that stay in the station, what do they do?"

"Hang about the house. It's too hot to do much else. In the evening they go down to the Club."

"The Club?"

"It's a Sports Club, really. There's a polo ground and golf and tennis, and when it gets dark, we sit in front of the Club House and have drinks."

And as he spoke there rose clearly before him a picture

of the Chiengmai Club: the long polo ground, the wide-spreading trees, the great clumps of bamboo with their towering plumes; and the table with the bottles spread out on it, round which they would sit talking when the light had failed, ten to a dozen of them attached to one another by those ties of mutual interdependence and reliance for which there was no counterpart in the self-contained, self-sufficient nature of city life. Very clearly he can see it all, but he can find no words with which to convey the hallowing content of those tranquil evenings. You have to go there to understand. Otherwise it would be like looking from the outside at a stained-glass window: and he feels unhappy on account of his inability to explain the reality of that content; unhappy, too, on account of the strange puzzled look in the soft brown eyes that are looking up at him. She has sat there silently, taking no part in the conversation, but it has seemed to him that in spite of his innumerable letters, she is visualising now for the first time the life he is expecting her to share.

"And is that," she asks slowly, "what happens every night?"

He nods.

"Every night the same people?"

"More or less. Now and then people come up from Bangkok. And the jungle men are coming in every few months or so for a rest."

"And that's all; that's what life's like there all the year? There's no variety?"

He shakes his head, wretchedly conscious of his incapacity to show by what impalpable influences a life that simplicity has sweetened is constantly renewed.

"There's the Christmas meet when all the fellows come in from the forests, and we have dancing and polo, and the Gymkhana championships. We have pretty good fun then."

And he smiles, remembering the terrific fortnights when the jungle wallahs make amends in a few days for the tedium of many months: long, hard days of golf and squash and polo, followed by long nights of revelry.

"But they're the same people," Dorothy persists, "the same people you've been seeing all the year."

"Oh, yes, the usual jungle crowd."

She shudders. "The same people, and the same place. Oh, my poor darling," and jumping to her feet she stretches out her hand to him. "At any rate," she cries, "we can d-dance now."

But that earlier thrill is irrecapturable. Their feet are moving no longer intoxicatingly to the same rhythm: it is mechanical and uninspired. A gloom has fallen over them.

"It's getting late," the diplomat is muttering. "And I've got to be up earlyish to-morrow. Don't let me break the party up, though."

Every one is, however, glad, it seems, of the excuse.

"It really is, Janet, darling, getting a little late."

"And I've seen the day break twice this week."

"And there's the Houstons' show to-morrow."

"It's been such a h-heavenly evening."

It is without gaiety and with no long pavement conversations that they disperse. And it is in silence though hand in hand that he and Dorothy drive back together.

They are oppressed, both of them, by the menacing shadow of a new-born fear.

Suddenly with a little sob Dorothy turns and flings herself into her lover's arms.

"Darling, oh, darling, darling," she cries, "I love you so. Whatever may happen, do believe that, do remember that. I'll never love any one as I'm loving you now."

§

Two months later with eyes that tears are blinding he sits gazing at the letter whose contents he knows practically by heart.

"It's no good, my darling dear" (it runs), "it would be simply misery for both of us. In ten years when I've worked through all this I might be able to, or if I had gone out at the very beginning before all this started . . . But I've taken root here now. And I'ld just wither if I were transplanted. It's not only myself I'm thinking of. If it were I believe I'ld risk it. But it wouldn't be myself only that I'ld hurt. I'ld smash your life up and your career. And a man's what his job makes him. I'ld only be a drag on you. It's no good, Jimmy darling, and you know it, and I'm broken-hearted."

He has read and re-read how many times now those dozen or so lines of straggling minute handwriting? But in his imagination how many times oftener has he not re-read them, the lines of the letter which from the very beginning he has realised that sooner or later he must read?

From the very start he has realised that; from that first evening when they had rushed hectically across London in search of new people and new places. They love each other; but love is not everything. Love, like all else, depends upon its setting. And if he were to move Dorothy from her setting into his . . . no, no, it wouldn't do. She is quite right. It wouldn't do.

From its corner beside the mantelpiece the bell of the telephone begins to tinkle.

"It's m-me, Dorothy," breathlessly and eagerly a voice is saying. "I've thought of something. Such an idea! I was talking last night to Uncle Harold. ' He said if you'ld chuck your teak job, he'ld give you a chance in his office. It would be quite a decent opening. C-couldn't you, darling, couldn't you?"

For a moment, while she is actually speaking, with the sound of those loved accents in his ear, the temptation to accept is overpowering. And had she been standing before him as she made the offer, had it been a presence and not a voice that pleaded, he would have been little able to resist the glowing of those soft eyes, the trembling of that so-loved mouth. She would have stretched out her arms to him, and like a blinded man he would have staggered to their sanctuary, to the warmth, the bliss, the security that they promised.

But she is not beside him, and the voice is still, and across his indecision speaks imperiously the recognition of that long chain of loyalties by which he is attached to that far station, that small community of men and women who have trusted and befriended him, who have made him

one of them, who have taught him his job, who have relied on his return.

"Couldn't you, my sweet one, couldn't you?"

For one clear-sighted instant he sees in all its swooning sweetness what marriage to Dorothy would mean: that rapture which he will find in no other arms, against no other lips. But though his heart is a shredded agony, he cannot utter the syllables of surrender. A man and his job. What was it she had said about them? A man being what his job made him. And if he were to fling up that . . . no, no, he would be abandoning things that were not his to loose. They relied on him, those people, they had need of him. One must plough one's furrow to the end.

"I can't," he cries, "I can't. It's too late now, it's gone too deep. Those other fellows, they've been good, they've trusted me. It's too late. I can't go back upon them now!"

§

And then the final snapshot.

§

It has been a long day's march. Twelve miles or so through flooded rice-fields and the rockiest of mountain paths, and he and Carrington have pushed on in front, arriving at the bungalow a good two hours ahead of the elephants and coolies. They have had their tiffin, and are sitting drowsily content on the verandah steps. It is a September day; warm and golden, and across the swollen

waters of the Menam the jungle towers green and fragrant after a night of rain.

"Another ten minutes and we'll have our beds up."

At his side Carrington makes no reply. His eyes are rested fondly on the familiar landscape: the hurrying river, the forest's luxuriant foliage, the little group of bamboo huts within the compound. Nature, on this lazy afternoon, in this interval of the autumn rains, has rarely seemed more in harmony with man. An air of tranquil graciousness overhangs the place. In the soft mud beside the water a couple of buffaloes are wading leisurely, with small naked infants straddled across their backs. In the shrubberies beyond cowbells are tinkling musically. In front of one of the bungalows a pot is boiling and a group of Lao women in brightly-coloured sinns are seated round it, chewing betel nut. Tranquil, beyond speech tranquil.

With a little sigh Carrington rises to his feet.

"My last trip," he says. "Well, I'll be sorry to say good-bye to it. You spend twenty years counting the weeks to your last chukka, and then when it comes you find that the place has got a hold on you, and you'ld be ready enough to begin the whole thing again."

"But you're not going back to England, are you?"

Carrington shakes his head. "No, no," he answers. "I've been here too long. Burma, perhaps, or Indo-China, or I may go and have a look at Java. Not England, though; it's a foreign country to me now."

But that is not the reason. And his junior knows it. England is no place for a man with a Lao wife and half-caste children. That is why Carrington is staying East;

to keep his children in their setting, where they can face their future on equal terms.

"Seen England for the last time," he says.

And as they lean against the verandah rail, watching the elephants file one by one into the compound, they are mutely conscious of the similarity of their positions. They are English, both of them, with England in their bones and blood, yet they are working here on alien soil because a woman has promised things, because a woman had given things. No reference has been made ever to Arbutt's unaccompanied return, three months back. It has been accepted as things are accepted in the far places where a man is allowed the privilege of his own secrets. But between the younger man and Carrington the bond of intimacy had been drawn tighter by that uncommunicated sorrow.

Lazily he stretches his arms above his head. The last elephant has wound its way into the compound. The business of unloading has begun. In five minutes their beds will be set up. They will "lie off" for an hour or so. Then after tea, after they have shaved and tubbed, they will stroll down to the river and watch the bathing of the elephants. They will linger for a little, exchanging gossip with the villagers, till the sun has set and the time has come for the first *stengah.*

They will not talk a great deal as they sit there, sipping at their glasses, but they will be glad and grateful for each other's company. Their limbs will be lax and weary after the long day's march. Their eyes will be soothed after the long day's glare. In their ears the chorus of cicadas will murmur wooingly. They will just sit there savouring the

relish of accomplished labour, their senses tranquillised, at peace under the tropic night.

With a long slow sigh that is half gratitude and half regret, Arbutt draws the heavy sun-soaked air into his lungs. Waters of Babylon, but not wholly brackish . . .

A woman sent you there; a woman kept you there. But it was a man's life when you got down to it.

CHIENGMAI

VIII

THE white community of Chiengmai is composed of two groups; there are the timber men and there is the mission.

In many parts of the world, particularly in the South Seas, missionaries have, through prejudice and ignorance every impartial witness is agreed, done, though in all sincerity, very much more harm than good. It is impossible, however, to overpraise the work that has been done by the American medical mission in North Siam. In forty years it has built hospitals and schools. It has also in a country where leprosy is not a notifiable complaint, organised one of the best leper hospitals.

I was taken round it by the senior Padre.

We went first to the men's part; and to that part of it which had been set out as the plan on which ultimately the rest of the hospital is to be rebuilt. It had been arranged

like a garden suburb, in a series of small crescents; with neat, brightly painted bungalows, each with its carefully ordered plot of ground in front. The gravel paths were trim and closely weeded. In the centre of each crescent blazed gorgeously an immense bed of flowers. And on the steps and on the verandahs of the bungalows the patients lounged lazily in the heavy sunlight, gossiping and chewing betel nut. It was very homelike.

"To begin with we used to let them marry," the Padre told me. "Leprosy is not the contagious thing it was once taken for. With proper precautions there is no reason why the children of lepers should be infected. But we found it involved us in too many complications. To carry on at all it was essential to separate the men and women."

We were crossing as we talked the waste part of ground dividing the men's quarters from the women's, that a collection of patients, in whose system the disease had made inconsiderable progress, were converting into a further series of paths and gardens.

Midway between the two sections was the chapel. And as we drew close to it, the Padre's pace slackened. It had been built only a couple of years back, and he could never pass it without a feeling of profound thankfulness that life should have been granted him long enough to see the completion of it. He was an old man, past sixty, weakened by fever and overwork. And to build such a chapel had been his life's ambition.

For thirty-seven years he had had to wait.

When he had come to Siam as a young man from Washington, there had been nothing at Chiengmai; nothing; no mission, no school, no hospital. There had not even

been a railway beyond Bangkok, and with funds scanty and supplies five weeks away, he had realised that till the schools and hospital were established every consideration but those of the most bare necessities must be denied. He had waited for thirty-seven years, till the time had come when he could build according to his dream. And there it stood now, a high, white building; very bare and open, as was inevitable from the conditions of the place, but possessed of genuine beauty, in its austere dignity of naked line.

"We have two services a week," he said, "and though there is no compulsion, there are very few of the patients who do not attend. They are all Christians; within a week of their joining us, they come of their own accord to be baptised. It is only natural after all. They were brought up as Buddhists, but Buddhism, for all its beauties, is not a religion that holds its hand out to the pariah. When the Buddha saw a leper, he was filled with disgust and turned away, and the Buddhists have allowed their lepers to lie unwanted about their streets. But Jesus when he saw a leper was moved, stretched out His hand and told His disciples that they should have care for lepers. So that the leper who all his life has held himself to be an outcast, discovers that after all there is a God who cares for him. He turns naturally to the God whose heart is so great that it has room in it even for the poor leper."

Beyond the chapel was the women's quarters. It had been arranged for the most part in long dormitories divided off into deep but narrow rooms, with seven to ten mattresses in each.

"It seems to work better this way with women," ex-

plained the Padre. "We once tried putting them in bungalows like the men, but the moment they get in couples they start quarrelling."

And turning to the bunch of women who were seated in the shady corner of the verandah, he began to joke with one of them about the bamboo basket she was plaiting. He pretended that she was a saleswoman and he a customer.

"I will give you," he said, "thirty satangs for your basket."

And she, in the true Lao spirit, began to bargain with him.

"Oh, no, master. It is worth eighty at the very least."

"Perhaps then I might give you forty."

"But I would not take less than sixty-five."

As they haggled the other women joined merrily in their laughter, relishing this travesty of a scene that had been so familiar in the life they had abandoned. They looked happy, but it was hard to look without revulsion at a woman in whom the disease was reaching its last stages. Her nose, as though the heel of a fist had been pressed ruthlessly upon it, was flattened back upon her face. The hands with which she was preparing her dish of curry were almost fingerless, while her feet, one of which was wrapped round with bandages, were no more than slabs of flesh marked here and there with certain irregular projections.

"You've got to have a strong stomach to stand that," I said.

The Padre shrugged his shoulders.

"One gets used to it, and besides one knows that they're

not unhappy really. They're all in the same boat. That makes a big difference."

"But you must have trouble with them sometimes?"

"How do you mean?"

"With the young ones, with those who are only affected slightly. That rule about marriage must weigh on them pretty heavily."

"They're at liberty to go."

"And do they often?"

"Occasionally."

"Do they come back?"

"More often than not."

I could understand their going. There was something pathetic about those little bungalows that had all the appearance but none of the reality of a home.

"It must be lonely," I said.

"That's the way Butterman talked," he answered.

I caught the reference.

I knew well enough the story he referred to. It was a story that every one who was in Malaya about that time had heard.

§

Butterman had been a familiar figure in Penang and Ipoh and K. L. For fifteen years he had worked in the Moulmon-Madras Timber Company and he had often been down to the E. and O. He had once even stayed over there for a week or so of leave. He was a popular enough fellow; good at games, generous with his money; though too reserved, too inexpansive as a result, it was said, of his lonely stretches in the jungle, to make close friendships.

He was an ambitious and conscientious worker; steady, trustworthy, unemotional, keeping his temper and his head. Every one respected him. "He's the sort of man you can feel safe with. He'll never do anything unexpected," it was said of him. No one was more surprised than the Padre when Butterman arrived in the station unheralded and for no very obvious reason, to request, his first evening at the Club, that he should be shown round the leper hospital.

It was the first time during his fifteen years in Chiengmai that he had displayed any interest in the mission's work. His behaviour was as curious as his request. He asked a number of questions with a startlingly unexpected interest and intensity. He demanded to know the symptoms of leprosy. When he was told where the first signs were to be seen, he repeated slowly over and over again, "The hands and feet, yes, yes, the hands and feet." He asked about marriage; of the probability of a leper's child being infected. He maintained with a curious fierceness that it was unfair to deny them marriage. He did not apparently listen to anything that the Padre said to him. Then suddenly without warning he held out his hand.

"It's been very good of you," he said. "It's been most interesting. It's a magnificent work . . . no idea it was anything like this. Well, good-bye, Padre, good-bye."

The sudden change of tone was as curious as it was embarrassing.

"We needn't surely say good-bye," the Padre said. "I shall be seeing you at the Club to-night."

"Afraid not. Going back to the jungle this afternoon."

"What! after only two days here!" It was a surprising

announcement. For Butterman's camp was a good week's march distant.

"Yes, only just came to have a look round. Good-bye, ever so many thanks, and"—he hesitated, then drawing close to the Padre, he touched him on the shoulder, lowering his voice to the tone which one employs for the communication of a shady confidence—"about that other business," he said, "you're quite right, you know, quite right. There are some people who aren't fit to marry."

It was a leave-taking as astonishing as it was abrupt.

§

All day long the disturbing impression of that odd interview remained with the Padre, so that when he happened to find himself that evening at the Club alone for a moment, besides Swaning, Butterman's manager, at the large round table on which after sundown drinks and glasses were set out, he returned instantly to the subject.

"I'm a little worried about one of your fellows," he said. "Do you mind if I talk to you about him?"

Swaning looked up quickly. He was a contemporary of Carrington's, and like Carrington he was at the point of retirement. They were similar types, though Swaning was less rough-hewn. Heavily built, with a small imperial and moustache that scarcely concealed the thickening and sagging of his chin-line, he was in point of years, little more than youthfully middle-aged, but the tropics had begun to take their toll of him. One thought of him as old.

"One of my fellows, who?"

"Butterman."

"Butterman?" He echoed the name incredulously. "But there's nothing wrong with him. He was fit enough a few hours ago when I saw him off!"

The Padre didn't reply directly.

"Wasn't his coming all the way down from Bahang-Kong for a two days' visit rather curious?"

Swaning shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said. "I give my lads a pretty free hand in the way of breathers. One has to. The jungle's a curious place. For month after month you'll be working along quite happily, everything seems all right, and then suddenly one morning something snaps, your nerves are gone, and you know that if you stay another hour there, you'll be off your head. A queer place, the jungle. The size of it, the loneliness, the never seeing of a white man for weeks on end; the bouts of fever, and all that hidden life of the jungle crowding so closely round you. Sometimes it's like a hand throttling you."

And sitting back in the calm of his last weeks, he mused on the number of men that he had known of whom the jungle in one way or another had got the better. The loneliness, the fever, the privation, the autumn rains, the summer heat: one by one they had gone down before them, with broken health or broken nerves.

"I don't think there's much wrong with Butterman," he said. "He just felt that it was time he had a rest."

The Padre was unconvinced, however.

"He behaved very curiously at my place this morning. I was wondering if there might not be something worry-

ing him. I don't want to interfere, but he hasn't got himself mixed up with any girl here, has he?"

Swaning laughed: a rather coarse, brutal laugh.

"I'm afraid as far as a sleeping dictionary's concerned, Butterman's Lao's going to remain as inadequate as it's always been. He's never had any use for that sort of thing."

"Exactly. And it was just because of that that I was wondering whether he mightn't have started now. Wasn't there some talk about his getting married during his last leave?"

"There was talk, but when it came to the point he decided that it wasn't fair to bring out a white woman to a place like this. I dare say he was right; it's no place to bring up children, what with the heat and the monotony. It's a dog's life for a young girl. There's only one woman in a hundred that could manage it. He didn't say much to me about it. He just muttered something as far as I can remember about some fellows being not fit to marry."

The Padre started. It was the same oddly arresting phrase that Butterman had applied to the celibate lepers at the hospital. Not fit to marry. . . .

"I wish," he said, "that you'ld have rather a careful look at him next time you're in the jungle. I can't help being worried about him. I'm not at all sure that he doesn't want more than a two days' rest."

§

A fortnight later Swaning was in the jungle, and during the first week of his trip he had ample opportunities of

watching Butterman closely. He could see nothing wrong. Butterman's accounts and reports were in perfect order. His comments on the working of the teak had been extremely lucid, extremely practical. He was fit enough. There had been nothing but a momentary touch of nerves that the Padre had magnified out of all proportion. A touch of nerves, and who should know better than he how common that was, after twenty-five years of it out here.

Twenty-five years: a long chunk out of a man's life. Not that he was regretting it. At the beginning he had been sick enough. That morning when his father had taken him into his study to explain. Yes, that had been a bitter enough tasting medicine. "I'm very sorry, my boy," his father had said to him, "but things have not been going too well with me of late. And I cannot afford to send both of you up to Oxford. You are the elder and you have the right to the first consideration. At the same time to a man such as your brother, who's an intellectual pure and simple, whose career will probably be one of scholarship, a university education is a far more important thing than it can ever be for you. It seems to me indeed essential to his future. Whereas I feel that while you would be handicapped, you would not be crippled by its absence. If you insist, of course, on what is after all your right, I will never refer to the matter again. I must say I hope though . . ."

Yes, it had been bitter medicine, but he had swallowed it. And here he was now going back to London in the middle forties, retiring on a capital of forty thousand, which was more than that brother of his would be able to do if he lived to eighty. He had swallowed the medi-

cine to the last drop. He had played the game through to the last chukka. All down the course he had kept his head. He had not flung his money about on expensive leaves. He had not married his Lao woman like those others had, and when he had come back to Chiengmai as station master he had not allowed himself to become fettered by those bonds of propinquity and habit which others had found hard when it came to the last to break. He had built Cheam a bungalow beside the river; when the children had grown up he had sent them to be educated in Malaya. He would play the game by them, he would leave enough when he went away to give them a start in life. They should have their bread and butter, and if they wanted the jam to spread on it, well, they must find that for themselves. As for Cheam, she would be happy enough with her bungalow and a paddy-field or two. She would not feel she had been ill-treated. She was unwesternised. She believed, as all Laos did believe, that the mere fact of a man and a woman living together constituted marriage, and that marriage meant simply the observances of certain practical obligations. Well, he had observed those obligations. He would leave a clean record here. He was getting the best of both worlds, getting it both ways.

His last jungle trip. In a few weeks now Butterman would be coming down to Chiengmai, to take over. A good fellow, Butterman: sound, steady, practical. It had been ridiculous of the Padre to imagine that there was anything wrong with him. He was getting old, the Padre; old and fanciful and fussy. A good fellow, but getting old; had seemed old even in those distant days when himself had been a junior assistant.

So he mused at the end of a hard day's march as he lay back in the long comfort of his chair over a gin *pahit*, living again the days of stress and struggle. His eyes began to close, and his mouth to sag. A hard life, a good life, and now London at the end of it. The best of both worlds, he had had the thing both ways.

A good life, a hard life. His head began to nod . . . In another minute he would have been asleep had not a shriek at his elbow abruptly disturbed his reverie: a wild, uncanny shriek it was; like that of an animal maddened by fear and anger. "Heavens!" was his first thought, "a tiger." But before he had had time to blink his eyes, he had realised that this was no occasion for alarm.

"Good heavens, man!" Butterman was shrieking. "What on earth are you doing with those socks?"

He had risen to his feet: his whole body, for all that he was trying to support himself against the table, was shivering as though with ague; nor could he keep steady the arm with which he was pointing at the astonished "boy," who stood gaping in the doorway of the tent, a pair of white socks dangling from his hand.

"What are you doing?" Butterman shrieked. "Who told you that you could touch them?"

The boy was so frightened that he could scarcely speak.

"The socks master wear to-day," he stammered, "they dirty. I go wash."

"And who told you that you could wash them?" Butterman bellowed. "How dare you touch my things without permission? I'll tell you when I want things washed. You put them back."

The boy hesitated.

"They dirty, master," he explained. "Master no can wear."

For answer Butterman beat madly with his fist upon the flimsy table, making the glasses and the bottles shake on their tin tray.

"You put them back," he shrieked. "You put them back." And as the boy hurried back into the hut, he sank into his chair with a slow gasp. His eyes were blazing and his cheeks were pale, his lips trembled and there was a circlet of sweat along his forehead. He lay back breathing heavily as though he had completed some immense effort, as though he had been preserved from some immense danger.

"They spy on one," he said. And he pronounced each word separately and distinctly, as a child does when it repeats a lesson. "You can't trust them. All the time you have to be on your guard against them. Spies. Every one of them. Spies!"

Swaning made no reply. He nodded his head and sipped slowly at his emptying glass. But he knew in that instant that it was over no fancy that the Padre was worrying.

"I was wondering," he said some ninety minutes later, as the boy was clearing away the dinner, "whether it wouldn't be a good idea for you to come back to Chiengmai with me to-morrow. You'll be taking over in a month or so, and it wouldn't be a bad idea if we were to work side by side for a little, so that you can see how things fit in."

Butterman, who since his recovery from the outburst had been exchanging in a perfectly normal manner the mixture of personalities and business that are the basis of conversation, eagerly welcomed the suggestion.

"I can't say how grateful I should be to you if I might," he said. "There are one or two things that I'm not any too certain about." And he began to discuss certain points of routine and policy in a fashion so lucid that Swaning began to wonder whether after all he and the Padre were not simply imagining things.

"There can't be anything wrong," he thought, "with a man whose brain's as clear and collected as this man's is."

Before the night passed, however, there had occurred another slight, but following on what had occurred previously, strangely disquieting incident.

For some reason or another, Swaning had found that he could not sleep. And in order to compose his thoughts he had decided to read for a few minutes. He had been unable, however, to find any matches and walking to the opening of his tent was just about to call his boy when he saw that Butterman had a light burning still. To avoid disturbing the camp he walked across the few yards of ground that divided the two tents.

"Sleepless too?" he began. "I was wondering . . ." then stopped abruptly before the unexpected sight that confronted him.

Cross-legged upon his haunches, Butterman was seated on the small rubber ground-sheet beside the bed, with the wide black silk Chinese trousers in which it is the fashion for Europeans in Siam to sleep, rolled back over his knees. With a large heavy-powered electric torch he was examining his naked feet.

"Good Lord," said Swaning, "what's the matter? Have you got mud-sores?"

Butterman had given a start at the first sound of his

friend's voice, but the expression of surprise changed quickly to one that Swaning found impossible to diagnose. It was a mixture of knowingness, and suspicion, and furtive cunning; a look that was at the same time a shield against detection and an invitation to share in a conspiracy. There was triumph in it, and fear, hatred and distrust and friendship. And when Butterman spoke his voice had a peculiar intonation that should have been the key to the mystery, but was at the same time an added veil across it.

"Not yet," he said, "not yet. Nothing that you can see as yet."

And Swaning as he heard it shuddered as though he had been brought face to face with something that was uncanny and unhealthy, something that was outside the experience of practical mortality.

§

There was an odd smell of burning about the house. For a week, ever since their return from the jungle, it had clung furtive and intermittent to the wide-windowed, wide-verandahed bungalow. For half a day or so you would think it had disappeared, and then suddenly as you came into a room or went on to a verandah, you would meet it, vague, sinister, repellent. And for hours, although it was so slight that a stranger coming into the house would not have noticed it, the smell would follow you. You would taste it in your food and in your wine. It would be upon the soap with which you washed your face and in the flowers which were upon your table. You waited for it,

sought for it, in the same way that during a sleepless night you will listen with a straining ear for the faint rattle of a window pane in a distant corridor.

"For God's sake, man, can't you find where that smell comes from?" muttered Swaning irritably to his boy. "It must be something that the boys are doing in the kitchen."

But the boy lifted his clasped hands before his face.

"No, no, master," he pleaded. "Boys worried by it as much as master. No can find, no can find!"

It was in the liveliest of ill-tempers that Swaning went in to breakfast.

In the doorway of the room he paused.

Butterman as usual was down already. He was seated in a wicker chair on the verandah manicuring his nails. It was a habit to which he was becoming increasingly addicted. The hours of idleness that most men devote to pipes and cigarettes he would spend drawing a long steel file slowly round the oval of his nails lifting his fingers to the light to examine his handiwork; then once again remitting the supple metal to its task. A testy comment rose to Swaning's lips, but he bit it back; the fellow was his guest here, after all. And walking over to the table he took his seat at it.

The laundry account had been placed on a slip of paper beside his plate, and as the meal had not yet been served, he picked the thing up and glanced at it. It had been arranged in two columns; down one side of it was a list of the various articles: shirts, collars, singlets, handkerchiefs. And against each article was set in the first column the number of pieces that he had sent, in the second those that

had been sent by Butterman. He amused himself for a moment by a comparison of the number. Shirts, collars, handkerchiefs; the same number identically. Then suddenly he gave a whistle.

"Good Lord, man!" he said. "You're pretty economical in socks."

Butterman looked up quickly.

"Economical? Socks? What do you mean?"

"Do you know that you haven't sent a single pair to be washed this week?"

Butterman did not answer. Instead he rose to his feet and walking to the table, leant forward over it.

"Don't you think," he said, and he spoke slowly, articulating each word carefully. "Don't you think it would be better if I were to go back to my own house now? It was extremely kind of you to offer me your hospitality. But I must not trespass on it too long. The alterations that were being made to my house are practically completed. Don't you think it would be better if I were to go?"

Swaning watched him closely. There was nothing unusual or unexpected in Butterman's suggestion. A man preferred to be among his own things. But behind the intonation of the words, "Don't you think it would be better," it was almost as though he had heard a threat. It was absurd, of course. Butterman and he were old and proven friends. It was absurd, utterly absurd. He would have to watch himself. A man was in a bad way when he began to imagine things.

"Don't you worry about that, my dear fellow," he said. "It's only for another day or two. It's so jolly having you.

Life gets a little lonely sometimes for an old bachelor like myself."

"Old bachelor," he repeated and the pitch of Butterman's voice rose suddenly to a laugh. "Why didn't you marry then? What was to stop you marrying? And now you are finding yourself lonely!"

"Well, sometimes, naturally."

Again Butterman laughed, a high-pitched laugh, that was a cackle almost.

"Lonely! those homes that are not homes, that have all the appearance, but none of the reality, none of the sweetness of a home! Lonely, yes, I think I'd better be going, Swaning."

"It's as you choose, of course. But if you go I shall be extremely sorry. It's nice having you."

"Nice having me? But why, why, why should you like having me?" He did not wait, however, for a reply. "Well, if you want me, I suppose I might as well. Here, or another place, it comes to the same thing."

And pulling back a chair he sat down hurriedly at the table. At that moment the boy arrived with breakfast.

It was the usual two-course meal. Eggs and bacon, preceded by a sardine fish cake. But though Swaning doused his plate in tomato ketchup, and stirred three lumps of sugar into his tea, through every mouthful that he took he was conscious of that acrid, persistent taste of burning. "No wonder," he thought, "we get nervy with this smell about the place."

"By the way," he said, "the Padre will be dropping in to-day for tiffin."

Butterman made no comment. He finished his fish cake,

helped himself to three of the four eggs upon the dish and consumed them resolutely. "Whatever else there may be wrong with him the fellow's appetite's all right," thought Swaning. It was not till he had finished his fourth piece of toast and marmalade that Butterman spoke again.

"Do you often," he asked, "have the Padre here to tiffin?"

"Not too often; now and again."

"Once every four months or so, for example?"

"About that."

"And when did you ask him last?"

"I forget, some while back at least. It seemed about time to be asking him again."

Butterman grunted.

"Tiffin isn't a very usual meal to be asked to. It isn't like dinner, is it? One doesn't usually ask a man to tiffin unless it's for some special reason. I wonder why you asked him here to-day."

"My dear fellow . . ."

But Butterman, once he had set the question, appeared to have lost all interest in the subject.

"Here, or another place," he said cryptically, "it comes to the same thing."

And rising from the table he walked over to the wicker chair by the verandah, drew from his pocket the long steel file and set himself once again to smooth the curved surface of his nails.

Swaning drew a perplexed hand across his forehead. Where was he? what was happening to him? was this the friendly, familiar world in which he had lived so long? As he walked out of his bungalow, he felt himself to be

escaping from the poisoned atmosphere of some prison house.

He had left the house earlier than usual, but the car was already waiting for him.

"Straight to the office, master?" asked the syce.

Swaning shook his head. He had need before the day's work started of a few moments of fresh air, and the arrival of the laundry account had reminded him that there were several articles of which he stood in need.

"Drive to Yem-Sing's," he said.

It was nine o'clock: the heat of the day was still some hours distant, and the main street of Chiengmai was crowded with men and women hurrying by in their brightly coloured sinns: many of them carrying slung across their shoulders deep tins of water and baskets of fruits and vegetables. They drove slowly, for the motor-car was as new a visitant as the railway to North Siam, and neither had the Laos acquired the habit of avoiding danger, nor had the drivers learnt to resist the thrill of speed; incapacities so regrettable in their consequences that the authorities had marked at either end of the main street a series of artificial bumps in the centre of the roadway to enforce a slackening of pace. At a speed of little more than five miles an hour Swaning's car drew up before a Chinese store.

"I want quite a lot of things, Yem-Sing."

The merchant passed his hands across each other; and his lips parted gratefully over teeth blackened by many passages of lime-tinged betel nut, as Swaning hurried through his list.

"Six shirts," he repeated, "six singlets, two dozen hand-

kerchiefs, a dozen pair of socks, white socks. Ah, but that is the one thing I cannot manage. I have not in my shop a single pair of white socks left."

"What!"

"I am sorry, master, extremely sorry." And in the Lao fashion he lifted his clasped hands before his face. "But only a week back the naï Butterman came in here and bought every pair of white socks I had."

"The naï Butterman!"

"Yes, master, truthfully. 'How many pairs have you of white socks?' he says. 'Forty or fifty pairs,' I tell him. 'Very well,' he answers, 'I will take the lot.' "

"Forty or fifty pairs!"

"To be exact there were forty-seven."

For the second time that day Swaning rested a perplexed hand upon his forehead. Forty-seven pairs, and not one pair sent to the laundry; and in the jungle that curious outburst against his servant; and that strangely intonated phrase: "Wouldn't it be better if I went?" Those questions about the Padre; the odd expression in his eyes when he had come that evening into his tent. Where was it, what had happened to it, that friendly, that familiar world?

As he came out into the sun-drenched street he noticed the Padre's car passing on the other side of it.

"You're coming to tiffin to-day, aren't you?"

For answer the Padre drew up his car beside the pavement.

"Tell me," he said, "how is Butterman?"

Swaning shook his head helplessly. "I don't know," he said. "It's something I don't understand. Something I

don't begin to understand. At times he seems perfectly all right, so perfectly all right that I begin to wonder whether it isn't just myself imagining things. It's a hopeless situation."

"I know, I know. And we're so far here from everything. If we could only get him down to Singapore or Bangkok even. If only a specialist in these things could look at him. It's outside my scope. I can only guess at things. Ah, well, at any rate, we shall have some common ground to compare notes on after tiffin."

§

It was a tiffin of which Swaning was able subsequently to remember little. He could not recall what they ate or what they drank, or of what they spoke. There remained only the recollection of vague constraint; of himself talking loudly and incessantly on topics that were of no interest to him: of the Padre's thin, high-pitched voice breaking in with an occasional comment: of Butterman taciturn and glowering, eating prodigiously of every dish: a vague impression. Everything that was said and thought during the early stages of the meal was muffled and obliterated by the one unforgettable moment of dramatic action. The rest was dim. He could not even remember how that moment had come about. Suddenly it had been there upon them. One minute it had not been, the next it was. One minute he had been talking in quick, querulous, excited sentences, the next for some obscure reason unknown to him he had ceased; had realised suddenly that Butterman in a trance almost of detachment was

leaning on his elbows across the table, the hands lifted before his face, examining his fingers with the minutest care; had realised that the Padre in a trance also was gazing at them as in moments of hypnotic influence the subject will gaze at some bright object, a shilling, a crystal, a metal disc; found himself as his voice trickled into silence, gazing in his own turn, fascinated, spellbound, at those thin, tapered fingers that slowly one by one Butterman was revolving under his inspection.

Of how long they sat there Swaning had no idea. It was one of those instants that, belonging as they do to eternity, are timeless. There was the dateless interval of silent gazing, then the sudden shattering of that instant; the lifted head, Butterman's glance passing from one to the other, and the coming into his face as he realised he was being watched of an incredibly sinister expression.

"Ah!" he said, "ah!" And he laughed, leaning further forward across the table, so that his hands were held almost beneath their faces. "Look at them, look closely—they're interesting hands. They're firm, strong hands; feel the bones, how strong they are. Such strong hands, it wouldn't be difficult for them to kill a man. They'ld go round his throat so quietly: they'ld just tighten, tighten, tighten, so firm and strong: such firm strong fingers, right to the finger-tips, to the very extremities: the extreme extremities."

Coldly, regularly, inexorably, like the chill, persistent rain of a northern twilight, the words followed one another. Then suddenly with a laugh, he flung himself back in his chair.

"By the way, Padre," he said jovially, "I know what I

wanted to ask you: you're the very man to help me. I wonder if you could find a new boy for me?"

"New boy? but what's wrong with the one you've got?"

"What's wrong?" and into the voice had returned the note of menace. "He spies, that's what's wrong with him, he spies. And I've no use for people who spy on me. I should remember that, Padre, if I were you. I get rid of them . . . one way or another. You'll get me a new boy, won't you?

"By the way, Swaning," he went on. "I've thought of rather a good scheme for stabilising the value of the tical round Be-koy." And for the next twenty minutes he discussed that very real problem of jungle life, the fluctuating value of exchange, with admirable clearness.

"I can't make it out," said Swaning afterwards. "There are times when he seems the sanest man I've ever come across. At others . . . well, you saw what he was like . . . one can't place it, that's the trouble. One doesn't know what one's up against."

It was at that moment that the boy who had been moving for some seconds at Swaning's side, came forward. On his face was a peculiar smile of triumph.

"I have found out, master, whence comes that smell."

"Ah!"

"It is the naï Butterman."

"What!"

"Yes, master, the sweeper discovered it. Every morning the naï Butterman burns in his bathroom the pair of socks that he has worn the day before."

§

Although there had been no creak of a lifted latch, no sound of a footfall in the passage, Swaning was conscious as he bent forward among the papers on his desk that some one was standing beside him in the room; some one who stood watching him with intent, malicious eyes. And for a moment he felt so terrified that he did not dare to move, did not dare to disturb that silent watching, did not dare to face the menace that was waiting him. Then with a quick jerk of resolution he looked up.

"Well, Butterman," he said, "and what is it I can do for you?"

By an immense effort of will he kept his voice natural and level-toned. But he felt the palms of his hands go moist as he met that glazed, uncannily bright stare.

"I'm rather busy at the moment," he went on, "but if you'ld care to sit down and wait a little . . ."

Butterman laughed. He was not wearing a topee, and the hair that fell dankly along his forehead was dishevelled. There was no collar stud at his throat, and the silk tie that held his shirt was knotted loosely. His sleeves were rolled backwards above his elbow. In his eyes there was that same expression of hunted and desperate cunning with which he had leant forward an hour back across the tiffin table, and his laugh had that false unnatural note which one associates with the villains of melodrama. In his hand he was holding a heavy Colt revolver.

"Wait," he cried. "Oh, I don't mind waiting for a little. I'm in no hurry. The Padre will be at the hospital another two hours yet."

"So you're going to see him?"

"Yes, when I've done with you," and stepping forward

he seated himself on the edge of the table, without lowering for an instant the revolver that he had levelled at Swaning's head.

"So you thought you could spy on me," he said; "that you could bring me down from the jungle and keep me in your house and spy on me; that you could have the Padre to tiffin with you, waiting and watching till the moment came. You thought you were very clever, didn't you, that I shouldn't see through you as easily as I saw through that boy of mine. You weren't quite clever enough, were you?"

"Now, my dear fellow," Swaning expostulated, "do be sensible. What on earth is there that we could be spying on you for?"

"Spying on me, what for? Ah, but my good fellow, there's no need for us to pretend things any longer. We know well enough, we three, you and he and I. My boy may suspect, but he doesn't know. There's just we three, and there's no need for us to hide things from each other. We can be open now, can't we? It's so easy to be open now. Nothing's any longer at stake. It doesn't matter what we say or what we reveal; because in such a little while now there'll be only one of us who'll know. Only one left by . . . well . . . shall we say by three o'clock?"

And as he leant back laughing heartily, with the revolver held unwaveringly before him, the nature of his plan grew plain.

"So you're going to shoot me first," said Swaning quietly, "and then you're going up to the hospital to shoot the Padre."

Butterman nodded.

"At the same time I don't quite see how you'll manage to get both of us."

"No?"

"How could you hope to, my dear fellow? Think! a revolver's a noisy thing. You'll have no difficulty in doing me in, we'll admit that. But how will you ever get out of here when you have? There's only one way out of this room, the way you've come, through the main office, and there are three clerks there, to say nothing of a porter at the gate. What'll you do when you've finished me?"

"I shall walk straight out through your office to the car that is waiting for me in the porch."

"With all those clerks there?"

"They won't stop me. They'll be too astonished. People always are when something unusual happens. They'll be stunned into inaction. Suppose, for instance, you were to stand up on a table in the Ritz, shout 'Silence' and then recite at the top of your voice an indecent limerick. What, do you imagine, would happen? That you'ld be flung out? Nothing of the sort. People would just sit and gape at you, the waiters, the band, the diners, and you'ld get down from the table, walk straight out of the room, and no one would say a word to you. Which is exactly what I shall do when I've shot you, Swaning. I shall fire twice to make quite certain; then I shall walk out and no one will say a word to me. Long before the hue and cry has started I'll have settled my account with the Padre."

He spoke calmly, quietly, with the acute, clear sanity, that during the last days had characterised his discussion of every topic. It was as though by some law of compensation, the sickness that had warped one side of his intelli-

gence, had intensified his perceptions in every other. And as Swaning sat back in his chair a sensation of utter helplessness possessed him. Through the window of his office he could hear the honking of a car. In the office beyond two of his clerks were softly chattering together. Above his head the punkah was flapping lazily; the boy who worked it, the string of it tied round his toe, was rocking, half asleep, with slow, measured rhythm, only six feet away behind that partition of thin matchboard. All round him was the friendly, familiar world, pursuing its friendly, familiar course. And here he was trapped and weaponless.

"I should doubt," continued Butterman, "whether it was worth while prolonging the discussion."

And on the butt of the revolver his fingers tightened.

Swaning braced himself together. He was not the man to meet death unprotestingly. His desk, which was flanked with two narrow sets of drawers, was cut away in the centre to ease his legs; and he wondered whether he might not be able by slipping downwards suddenly, and pushing upwards, to overturn the desk and Butterman simultaneously. Anyhow it was worth trying. Even if he did not save his own life, he might create sufficient disturbance or delay to save the Padre's. Slackening the muscles of his legs and gripping tightly the seat of his chair so as to ensure strong leverage, he steadied himself to dive. ONE —TWO—he began to count, but just as he was about to spring, he noticed a change in his assistant. A perplexed look had come into his face, the muzzle of the revolver had begun to waver; he lifted his left hand towards his head, his lips quivered. He staggered to his feet, to stand

swaying stupidly. His fingers loosened their hold on the revolver, letting it fall clattering upon the floor. "My head," he sobbed, "my head." And his face pressed tightly into his hands, he began to sway like a drunken man across the room.

"Sunstroke!" gasped Swaning. "Sunstroke! He had no topee!" Leaping to his feet, he caught the reeling body into his arms.

§

An hour later in the small hospital ward that is reserved for American and European patients, Swaning and the Padre were standing at the foot of Butterman's bed. He was less restless now, packed as he was in ice, but he still tossed occasionally from side to side, and from his lips fell ceaselessly a delirious muttering.

"Those little painted bungalows up there . . ." that was the gist of his tortured rambling. "Shut away up there by oneself, all the sweetness of one's life denied one: the softness of a woman's arms, the softness of a woman's smile, not fit for them, not fit . . . too great a danger . . . the hands and feet . . . the bones eaten away, perishing . . . the scorn, the helplessness . . . not fit . . . not fit . . . they take one and they shut one away up there. They spy on you and watch you, wait till they are quite certain, then they take you . . . take you . . . and shut you away in a little bungalow . . . leave you there to rot and perish . . . fingerless, toeless, featureless, they wait and watch and wait for you . . ."

That was the gist of what he said.

"So he thought," murmured Swaning, "that he was a

leper, that we were spying on him. But he hasn't a symptom, has he?"

"Not a symptom."

"Then in heaven's name . . ."

The Padre lifted his hand. "Wait a moment," he said. "I think I see."

And as they stood there listening, gradually, through the labyrinth of repetitions and inaudibilities, the meaning of Butterman's trouble wound its way into the daylight, so that they came to see through what association of ideas the fever of an uneased longing had worked through that distracted brain till its owner had come to believe himself the victim of that dread disease.

"Not fit to marry," the voice went on; "the loneliness and the monotony, the fever; for eight months of the year living by herself . . . no dancing, no theatres, the treachery of the climate . . . and if she were to go out to the jungle, the squalor of a narrow tent . . . not fit to marry . . . the fellow who would dare to ask a woman to share that life . . . not fit to marry . . . You're right, Padre, not to let them marry . . . to shut them away in those little painted houses . . . danger's too great . . . the softness and sweetness of a woman, the way she smiles, the way she speaks, the way she opens her arms to you . . . no, no, Padre, you're quite right . . . they'ld only degrade it, spoil it, tarnish it, out in the jungle . . . too squalid, too narrow . . . lights and music and laughter . . . must give it them . . . they must have it . . . not fit to marry . . . shut them away in those bungalows . . . leave them to rot there in their sickness . . . not fit

to marry, Padre, you're quite right . . . shut us away, the lot of us . . . not fit to marry, not fit."

So the voice babbled on, and across that bed of suffering, Swaning's eyes met the Padre's in a look that absolved them of any need of words. They understood. There was nothing further to be said.

Another white man had been beaten by the jungle.

§

They got him back.

A fellow in the Sarawak company had his leave hastened by several weeks, and Butterman, his suspicions momentarily stifled by the weakness that followed his recovery, allowed himself to be persuaded by one of the junior assistants to accompany him. He would never come back, of course. Letters had been sent ahead to the London Office. The facts had been set out. Arrangements would be made for the proper medical treatment on the ship. There would be a pension waiting, efforts would be made to find him a suitable job at home. In eighteen months probably he would be all right. Siam was finished though. Never again would he see the steaming, luxuriant greenery of the jungle, nor the little attar huts beside the river, nor watch the grey logs swing slowly on their long road south to Bangkok.

Another white man beaten.

It was wistfully, with a heavy heart, that Swaning walked down to the Chiengmai Club on the evening of the day on which they said good-bye to Butterman. One less among them, and how few there were left now of

his contemporaries. The Padre and the Consul and Carrington. New faces otherwise, new faces that came and went: fellows that came out for a year on trial and flung their hands in after seven months; fellows who signed on as permanents, whom every one liked and trusted, for whom every one prophesied quick promotion, and of whom the jungle sooner or later got the better, who were brought in as Farquharson had been, on a stretcher, broken by malaria; or were sent back on a liner, their nerves gone, like Butterman. A hard life, too hard possibly for the white man. Not many came through as he had done to the last chukka. And in a few weeks he'ld be going.

Only a few weeks now. And for the first time in the course of those twenty-five years, those seven chukkas, he experienced a feeling of regret, almost of nostalgia, at the thought of saying good-bye to these familiar scenes. Twenty-five years. A large chunk out of a man's life. His youth and his early manhood, his first grey hairs. He began to wonder whether he would find life in London so good a thing as he had expected. What would there be after all for him to do? His contemporaries would be strangers to him now, and it was not easy to start making friends at forty-five. His father was dead; his brother settled down in Chichester. There were no open doors waiting for him. And he remembered with misgiving the life that is led in London by the majority of pensioned Englishmen: the aimless empty days, the hanging about the Sports Club, the waiting for some fellow to drop in with whom you may exchange gossip of the far places you will not see again. Long empty days, and the drab, fur-

itive romances with which one endeavoured to enliven them.

He hardly spoke during his game of golf, and afterwards when the sun had set, and the brief tropic twilight had darkened into night, he did not join the others at the large round table where the bottles and glasses were set out. Instead he walked slowly homewards at the Padre's side, and as they turned through the gate of the Club, for the first time in his life he passed his arm beneath the Padre's. For a little way they walked in silence: in a silence that was peculiarly intimate. The Butterman incident had drawn them very close together.

"We shall miss you," the Padre said at length. "I sometimes wonder what we shall do without you. It isn't so much that we shall be losing a friend, though that will be bad enough; for we've become accustomed to the loss of friends. It's, if you'll forgive my saying so, what you've stood for here. Life isn't easy, in a small society like ours. There are many temptations, many difficulties. I don't think we shall realise till you've gone, how much you've meant in . . . well . . . the keeping of things clean and straight."

It was the first time that the Padre had ever spoken intimately to Swaning, but there was no sign of embarrassment in his speech.

"We shall miss you," he said, "more than I can say."

"Yet I've not been what you'ld call a good man, Padre."

The Padre hesitated a moment before he answered. Not out of any embarrassment, but because he was searching for the exact words with which to convey his meaning. He knew well enough to what Swaning was referring:

the small bungalow beside the river, the unbaptised children who were growing into manhood in Malaya.

"A good man," he echoed. "I suppose by our Western ideas you wouldn't be. And I don't mind admitting that when I left America, I came here in the belief that there would be two main evils for me to fight against. Alcohol was one, and the second, and greater one, the white man's attitude towards the brown woman. But that's forty years ago. And in the course of forty years one's viewpoint alters. I don't mean that I think right the things I once thought wrong; it isn't that, but that those things which I once looked on as mortal sins, seem now, well how shall I put it, just rather a pity. There are other things that are very much more important than a standard of chastity that can never be more than relative. Courage, forbearance, kindliness; above all things kindliness. Those seem to me now the most truly Christian qualities. We are so few here and so far. It is so terribly important that we should be patient with one another. We shall miss you more than I can say."

They had reached the bridge over the river, the point where their roads separated. There were tears in Swaning's eyes as he said good night to the Padre, and it was slowly that he strolled on in the warm darkness under the tropic stars, watching the muddy waters of the Menam swirl past him. Twenty-five years. And it was a strange world that waited him, a world where he would have no certain habitat, where no one needed him, where no one perhaps would miss him when he went. He had talked of getting things both ways, but might it be that it was to end in his getting them in neither? Something like a sob rose in

his throat as he faced the prospect of his uprooting. He was loved after all and needed here. For a long while he lingered, beside the river, and when finally he hastened his pace it was not in the direction of his own house, but in that of the small bungalow where he had spent increasingly little time of late.

To his surprise he found Cheam alone. She was dressed, for he had never made any attempt to Westernise her, in a short blue silk jacket that fell shapelily over a gold and scarlet sinn; her feet were bare; her hair, that was bright with coconut oil, was drawn back tightly into the clutch of a high tortoiseshell and enamel comb. Her teeth, for from the betel habit he had discouraged her, were unfashionably clean. But from the corner of her mouth she was puffing slowly at a large white cheroot. As he came into the room she lifted her head in the calm unemotional manner that had from the first characterised their meetings. There had never been at any time between them what Europe would have admitted as passionate relations.

She looked at him steadily and incuriously. But as their eyes met he was conscious on this evening of self-discovery, of a curious sense of kinship with her. They were in the same boat after all, exiles from their youth and their ambitions. This life of theirs together had not been by any means the thing they had dreamed of for themselves. It was something quite other that they had planned. He had had his dream of Oxford, of English life and English shires, and she, no doubt, of such a mating and such a life as had their roots in the dateless annals of her race. But for each of them fate had intervened; on each had been laid the duty of obligation to a family. He had come here

that his brother might go to Oxford, and she in her turn had come to him because her parents could not afford to refuse the three hundred rupees that were her purchase. They were both in the same boat. And that same curious sense of belonging to this woman and to this country of his exile, that earlier in the evening had made him forsake the round table and the laughter and the drinks, returned with redoubled force upon him. England had grown a foreign country to him. He had taken root here, by Babel's waters.

Softly across the night came the tinkle of a temple bell; the symbol of that Eastern doctrine which preaches subservience to one's fate: the acceptance unprotestingly of one's dharma.

"I shall be retiring, you know, Cheam, in a few weeks from now," he said.

She bent her head slowly forward and he knew well enough what was passing behind that inscrutable masked face. How much of paddy-field was he to offer her and how many ticals.

"Very likely," he said, "I shall be staying on in Chiengman. I am thinking of building myself a house across the river. It would be easier probably if you were to leave this bungalow and come and live there with me."

Again she bent her head. Her face showed neither pleasure nor surprise. Child of Buddha, she was subservient to her dharma; to her fate, as to his ardour, passive and irresponsive.

"In which case," he went on, "it would probably be simpler if we were married according to English law."

"It is as the Naï wishes," she replied.

SAN FRANCISCO

IX

"THE women of France," my grandfather used to say, "are more fascinating than those of any other race. But I should be afraid of marrying one."

In the same words thirty years from now the men of my generation will, in all human probability, be speaking from the depths of a club armchair to such of the younger generation as may care to listen. But not of France, I think. The boulevards have come too close. The cafés have grown tawdry. We Georgians go to the continent as light-heartedly as the Victorians went to Brighton. Familiarity has robbed Paris of its mystery. And with the loss of that mystery has gone the Frenchwoman's magic. The glamour that in the nineties belonged to France has been transferred to the other side of the Atlantic. It is America now that is distant, strange, mysterious. It is

phrases like Broadway and the "Great White Way" that to-day thrill an English imagination. To the Victorians America was as remote as Papua, but in these days of radio and Western Union she is as close to us as France was to our grandparents. We no longer picture a journey to New York in terms of high adventure. She is strange to us, but she is familiar as well. There is the bond of cousinship. She is at the same time known and unknown. The two characteristics by which the English, whose temperament mingles conservatism with a wanderlust, are of all people in the world most held. Particularly in love. Leading their island life, English men and women have grown during centuries of interbreeding, demagnetised for one another, so that we meet now, as a brother and sister might. And love needs strangeness. Most travelled Englishmen would admit, I think, that they find the women of no other race as fascinating as the American. But at the same time the Englishman is afraid of marrying one.

He starts, of course, with a misconception. He begins by meeting a woman who is anything but a typical American, and since it is hard to escape from first impressions, his later views are coloured by her. His first impression is of the American woman travelling in Europe.

I was in the early twenties when I met my first. It was in Paris, on my first visit and my first evening there. I was feeling lonely and a little lost. I had drifted into the bar of my hotel. There were three people at the far end of it. Two of them were well-dressed nondescript young men; the third was a woman of about thirty-two, nice, friendly, affluent-looking. She smiled at me as I came

into the room. "Say," she called out, "are you all alone here too?"

I was, I told her.

"Then you come straight over here," she said. "You'll get into mischief in this city unless somebody looks after you."

She proceeded to look after me. By the time the evening ended with the dawn breaking over the Place Pigale our party had increased to ten. It was one of the pleasantest evenings I have ever spent. It was also, as Paris goes, the cheapest. At the start I tried to pay for a round of cocktails. I fumbled in my pockets when a taxi deposited us outside the Tour d'Argent. Later I tried to do something about dinner. By the time we had got to the Folies Bergère I had ceased bothering. The American insisted on being hostess. "Don't you worry," she said. "My poppa'll see us through." At first I thought she was referring to her father. Later in the evening I discovered that poppa was the American for husband. I have rarely enjoyed myself so much. But as we drove round from club to club I could not help wondering where, exactly, came in the husband whose industry in Philadelphia supported this excursion.

It is a question that most Englishmen ask themselves. Where does the American husband come in?

By the average Englishman the situation is completely misunderstood. The newspapers help him to misunderstand it in the same way that they help him to misunderstand every other aspect of the American scene. From the amount of space devoted to them in the English press one would imagine that America consisted of Hollywood

Bathing Belles, Chicago Gangsters, New York Speakeasies and lavish Trimalchian entertainments on Long Island and at Palm Beach. In the English comic papers the American husband is represented as the slave of his wife's extravagance. He is pictured at a desk, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, the tape machine tapping at his side, a secretary taking down dictation, while with what is left of his attention he listens to his wife saying over the telephone: "Honey, you needn't bother to get back for dinner. I'm going places." In the serious papers the English clubman reads of the power that the American woman exercises through her clubs. He is told amusing anecdotes of her matrimonial authority. He has seen cartoons of her buying her husband's clothes, and seeing cartoons of those clothes, has readily believed it. He learns that an American man would consider it unchivalrous to divorce his wife: that he must, however the guilt lies, accept the guilt. He has watched the American woman trapesing round Europe, issuing sight-drafts on Indianapolis, and according to his temperament he has decided either that the American woman has managed to put across the biggest transatlantic bluff that has ever been staged or that the American man being too busy developing a new world to bother about his wife as a comrade and associate has found it simpler and more convenient to make a goddess out of her. Either conclusion would be incorrect. It would be incorrect because either conclusion would present the American woman as a parasite, which is precisely what she is not. The American woman exercises a power that astonishes the European. She is able as the European wife is not, to ignore her husband; but that is not because she has been

able to make a slave of him, but because she is herself sufficiently independent to be able to regard him as unnecessary.

I had an inkling of this the first time I walked into a New York office. Ever since the war I had been accustomed to the sight of women in London offices, but nothing that I had seen in England had prepared me for the smartness and efficiency of the girls who were working in that office. They were alert, well-dressed, well-spoken. They gave the impression of having had each of them a college education—as likely as not they had—they seemed to know what their job was and to take an intelligent interest in it. In an English office you are not given that impression. The English girl is only rarely interested in her work. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred work for her is a marking time or an excuse for a liberty of action that otherwise she could not obtain. She regards whatever job she holds as a method of making pass agreeably the years before her marriage. She has no intention of working after she has married. That is not, as far as I see it, the American girl's attitude. She sets out to arrange her life as a man sets out to arrange his, so that she can stand four square upon her feet; so that she can take marriage in the same way that a man takes it, in her stride.

Which is not to say that she is on that account an any the less good wife. Marriage is ordinarily a sideshow in the life of an ambitious person. But there is no real reason why marriage should be an any the less efficient sideshow, because it is a sideshow, for a woman than for a man.

I remember meeting in London two years ago the rep-

resentative of a New York Literary Agency. She was in the middle twenties, extremely pretty, extremely charming. At first none of us in England could believe that she was an efficient worker. For in England the view still persists, in spite of quite a number of examples to the contrary, that no girl works who is attractive enough not to need to. Quite soon we were forced to realise that she was an extremely capable person. But later, when we were surprised to learn that although she was called Miss L——, she was actually the wife of a New York bond-salesman, we made the remark that so many Englishmen have made about American wives: "I wonder where he comes in?" And one day when we were discussing, she and I, the differences between English and American home life, I remarked, thoughtlessly, that I did not see how a woman could run a business and a home simultaneously without one or the other suffering. She looked at me curiously when I said it, but she made no answer.

A year later, when I was in New York, she invited me to dinner. It was one of the pleasantest, best stage-managed dinner parties that I have ever been to. One would have imagined that the woman who was responsible for that stage-management had made the art of entertainment her career. It was impossible to believe that she had been from half past nine that morning to half past five that evening interviewing clients, dictating letters, answering telephones, bargaining with editors and publishers. There was an amused twinkle in her eye when I shook hands with her at the evening's end. "Well," she said, "and which do you think has been sacrificed, my home life or my work?"

The American woman has learnt the art of combining

in one career what was supposed fifty years ago to be the separate functions of a man and a woman. It is this that makes her independent. And independence in a woman is a thing that the Englishman finds hard to recognise.

Sixty years ago, a married woman in England was not entitled to own property. And in the minds of most Englishmen the feeling persists that whatever a woman owns, she owns not in her own right but through the benevolence of some man. All money relations between man and woman in England are based upon that assumption. No man would borrow money from a woman. No man who lends money to a woman expects to see it back. It is only recently that men have let themselves be invited to meals by women.

At one time it was a standing joke between Berta Ruck and myself that whichever of us invited the other to lunch or dinner was always discovered at the end of the meal without enough money to meet the bill. Invariably the host had to borrow from the guest. And I remember one evening discovering just before I went out with her that I had only a pound note on me. "Oh, well," I remarked, "Berta'll have to lend me some again." My father was deeply shocked. "You don't mean to say that you'ld borrow money from a woman?"

"I'll give her a cheque for it," I said.

"Yes, but even so . . ."

My father could remember the days before the Married Women's Property Act was passed. I explained to him that Berta and I were fellow tradesmen, belonging to the freemasonry of writing. But he shook his head. "Bor-

rowing money from a woman," he said, "that's bad. That's very bad."

It was a survival of the Victorian attitude.

§

I was myself brought up to consider, as most Englishmen are brought up, that marriage was an obligation to the state; that during the middle twenties I should amuse myself as prudently as I could; that then the time would come when I should want to establish myself, to settle down, to accept the responsibilities of a wife and a family. One would accept them as one accepted a career, "for keeps."

I had not been in the world many years before I had begun to feel that there ought to be something more to it than that; that marriage should be an adventure, not a settling down, but even so, that proprietary feeling of responsibilities persisted. The Englishman does not believe that his wife is responsible for herself, but that he is responsible for her. By law he is responsible for her debts and actions. The law, whatever feminists may allege to the contrary, is in England based on the assumption that woman is incapable of self-management and needs protection. And a man, though he may grumble, does not object. It gives him a pleasant feeling of importance and of security. The law is on the woman's side. He knows that his wife could not manage without him. He believes that the only thing that will get her away from him is some other man. Nothing is more unlikely than that a woman should say one fine morning: "I'm bored with

this. We're going to separate." In England she is bound by her economic dependence. An English wife does not leave her husband except with another man until life in her home has been made absolutely intolerable for her. There would be nowhere for her to go, nothing for her to do. The entire fabric of her life would collapse.

In America, however, so it seems to me, a woman is as free to walk out of her marriage as in England a man is. She has her job. She works as often as not under her maiden name. The majority of people with whom she works, the people, that is to say, with whom she spends the greater part of her time, do not, if they know she is married, think of her as married. If her marriage collapses, she can continue with the main structure of her life in the same way that a man does. Which is the reason why the Englishman is afraid of marrying an American. Or rather, why he has to be a little more in love with an American than with a fellow-country woman before he proposes: if such things as proposals still exist.

For however one may feel about the adventure of marriage one does ask for an element of security. The American, no doubt, feels that security. The situation has grown out of the conditions of American life. The American man must know the answer to that question: where does he come in? He knows it. But the Englishman does not. Married to an American girl he would be constantly putting himself that question so destructive of his peace of mind: "Where do I come in?" He would see his wife spending eight hours of every day as Miss L——, conducting a career which was completely independent of their relationship. He would see her life bound up with

interests into which he did not enter. He would ask himself in dark moments of uncertainty what difference it would make to her if he were to go out of her life altogether. He would feel his sojourn in her life infinitely precarious. The temptation to grow jealous and suspicious is considerable. He might even make some foredoomed display of tyranny. Born to a certain way of life he is nervous lest he should make an extremely uncosy business of a different one; that he would find himself as lost in that atmosphere of independence as an American woman would find herself married into the dependence of English life. He knows it for the risk it is; he has to be a whole lot in love before he would be prepared to run it.

§

Though even as I write those words I recognise the hopelessness of attempting even the vaguest generalisation on any aspect of American life.

Ford Madox Ford once wrote a book with the title "New York Is Not America." I forget what he concluded America to be. As far as I can remember he made some vague references to the Middle West. Myself I have thought of writing a book with the title "*This* Is Not America," in which an Englishman would go from State to State, from town to town, seeing in each place new aspects and new ways of life, to be told at the close of each visit "But this isn't America, you know." For there is not one town, one state, one section of society in the United States of which other Americans will not say "That's all very well, but it's not America." And in a way they are right of course. America is so many things

that only a very rash person, or one more experienced than most of us in seventy years can ever hope to be, would say "America is this," "America is that."

Most Europeans come to America through New York, to have realised for them by the imposing outline of Manhattan, the long straight streets, the roar and rattle of the elevated, a preconceived impression of novelty and grandeur, of speed and noise. A first impression that as likely as not will stand in their way of appreciating other more essential characteristics of the New World. And I am grateful to chance for having brought me to America for the first time not by the Hudson River but through the Golden Gate; to make my first links not with New York, but California; and with that part of California where life is most surely based on traditions of large-hearted and unpretentious hospitality.

To the world generally California means the screen. But three hundred miles or so to the north of Hollywood life follows its course unaffected by the flickering fortunes of film favourites, as life has always followed its own course in the Monterey Peninsula.

A hundred years ago while Europe was shaken with revolutions, while the Caribbean was perplexed with the problems of coloured slavery; while Simon Bolivar was arming Spanish America against a tyrannical and corrupt government; northwards of the Carmel Valley, forgotten and far away, overlooked of history, with the pomp of custom, old ritual and bright shawls; the Catholic faith and serenadings under shadowed balconies, this last late flower of mediæval Spain was burgeoning. That world has gone but the spirit of it lingers. In spite of the '49, the oil

fields of Los Angeles and the swelling prosperity of the West, Del Monte and Pebble Beach remain a playground. Flanked by the Pacific and the Rockies life there is self-contained, uninfluenced by Europe and unaware of it. Such Europeans as one meets are birds of passage. During the happy carefree weeks that I have spent in the Peninsula I only met one Englishman who had made his home there. And he must have found it hard at times to remember that he was an Englishman.

§

It was fifty years since he had waved good-bye from the window of a train to the three or four friends who had come to Victoria to see him off.

"Good luck and good-bye!" they had shouted. "Mind you're back in time for the cricket!"

He was twenty-three, just down from Oxford and was setting out on the conventional *wanderjahre* before settling down as a barrister in Lincoln's Inn. He had planned a world tour, to last about eight months, that would see him in England by the beginning of the cricket season. He had booked matches for the first week in May, arranged about the chambers he was to work in, the diggings he was to share. And as a souvenir of those plans he still kept the unused portion of the ticket that was to have brought him back to them.

For it had happened just as it does in books, as it so rarely does in life, on a liner from Honolulu to San Francisco.

She was the first person he had seen when he came on

board, a frail wisp of a thing, with a wreath of flowers about her neck, waving farewell to a little knot of friends. There was laughter in her eyes and on her lips. It was the first time that he had heard the accent of a well-bred American, and just as there is no pitch that can be harsher, there is no pitch that can be more musical: it was pure and rich and sweet: golden-sweet like Château Yquem. "If she were to look at me like that," he thought, "I'ld be completely lost." He did not know if he wanted to be or not. She was marvellous. But Dick Vinning was an indolent and pleasure-loving person. And falling in love with an American six thousand miles out of London would complicate life confoundedly. "I'll leave it to chance," he said; and chance next morning chose to draw them as partners in deck tennis. There is a companionship in sport that is to be made nowhere else. Before the first set was finished they were friends. Long before the time had come for them to acknowledge their congratulations laughingly, Dick Vinning knew he was head over ears in love; for the first time in his life.

"And for the last time too, I'm certain," he explained to her two evenings later as they leaned against the taffrail, watching a baby moon wax goldenly. "And I'm going on pestering you till you say 'Yes.' So it would save you an awful lot of trouble if you were to say it now."

She looked him steadily in the eyes. There was a brooding, self-questioning look behind her smile. He felt that this frail, irresponsible creature had a most exact idea of what she wanted, and a very shrewd resolve to get it.

"How soon are you suggesting that we should get married?" was what she said to him.

At that he hesitated.

"It's a terrible thing," he said, "but I don't see how I'm to make enough to marry for at least six years."

She shook her head firmly.

"That won't suit me at all. I'm much too much in love to wait six years. If that's all England can give you you'ld better see if America can't go better."

That was how it had begun. And Richard Vinning who had been brought up to believe that there was something mysterious and not quite honourable about trade—it was one of the things one didn't do, or if one did do did not discuss—found himself working eight hours a day in a shipping agency. And in not too long a while actually making money at it.

That more than anything astonished him. Money, he had always pictured as something you were born with or had to do without. It could be earned, of course, but only by extreme brilliance or by a species of low cunning that gentlemen did not possess. Now, however, he found himself making money with the exercise of neither brilliance nor cunning, but simply of honest energy. It was very difficult for him to understand. He did not seem to be doing anything in particular. He just sat at a desk, things happened at a tremendous pace; and the commissions on the business that he supervised sprang up.

He tried to explain it to himself, but the only simile he could find was that of going down hill on a bicycle with the wind behind you. You just hung on and in the end you got there. That was probably how it was. America, a young people with vast resources, was like some great wind, and all you had to do was to get before

hat wind, and keep steady in it, keep your head straight nd your handlebars; just cling on, and it would do the work for you. But if you started looking round and dawdling, well, you got knocked over and passed and it was the end of you.

That, anyhow, was how he explained it to himself. "If I keep steady and hang on I'll get there."

So he shook his head when jolly people asked him to take drinks in the middle of the day, and drive out to the golf inks afterwards. He couldn't afford to, he told himself, f he was to stay the course. So he contented himself with a three-decker sandwich and a cup of coffee. And within forty minutes was back again in his offices, and there was a row of telephone messages and a cable from Champerico. Would he buy a coffee crop at such a price, and he rang up a broker and said, "I can let you have so many bags of coffee for so much." And "You can keep them," the broker said. So he rang another broker. "I can let you have so many bags of coffee for so much," he said; and after a pause the broker said, "We'll have them." And Dick Vinning sent off a cable to Champerico. And this was business he had brought himself and the commission on it would be between two and three hundred dollars. It didn't seem quite real. But then nothing seemed altogether real in this amazing country. Still, since that was the way things went . . .

And the telephone rang and the typewriters were tapping; and the cables were coming in: quotations for coffee crops from Mexico, for sugar from Hawaii, canned goods from Fresno; timber and cement from Norway; with orders for copra from the North and jute and rubber from

the East. He bought and sold and shipped and stocked insured and underwrote. And some one would bring i a card; the representative of some firm would be an nounced: there would be an "I'm real glad to meet you Mr. Vinning. It's certainly good of you to find the time. They would laugh and swap a joke and in ten minutes h would have got the man to the elevator with all said tha was necessary to be said, and the general impression give that they were regular fellows, both of them. It was si o'clock before he knew what was happening. And the he was out in Market Street again, hurrying northward up the steep hill towards his home, and there would b Sylvia, gay and laughing, bubbling over with the excite ment that was the prelude to a new plan.

Usually it was some extravagance or other. There wa no limit to her capacity for creating debts. Every yea he made more money, and every year his finances wer more involved. He was always living upon a shoe strin with bills to be paid, instalments to be met. He neve knew quite how it happened. He was always telling him self that in a short time when this had been settled an the other things, he would be able to ease off a little, tak afternoons off, work fewer hours, and then always ju before the time arrived some fresh complication woul turn up. A new car, jewellery for Sylvia, a new issue o bonds, an investment in real estate rushed into because h had just happened to have handy the money for the fir instalment, so that he would have to work harder tha ever to meet his obligations.

Always it happened in the same way.

"Darling," she would say, "I've got the heavenliest ide

We're going to build ourselves a house at Pebble Beach."

He would be so amazed that he could not answer. Pebble Beach was a good hundred miles away. What on earth should they be wanting with a house at Pebble Beach.

"It'll be such fun," she was saying. "I don't say that we'ld be able to use it much. Not now at any rate. But later on, for week-ends and things it would be just the thing."

But the price, he objected. You couldn't run up a cheap bungalow at Pebble Beach.

There was no need for them to build yet, she continued. The main thing was to get the ground. A real-estate man, it appeared, had called that afternoon. "Such a sweet person, darling, so good-looking. Blond and tall, with hair that crinkled. An angel, truly."

A real-estate man who had pointed out how every one wanted land along there, and how Del Monte was going to become the playground of the West. Soon all the best sites would be snapped up. "It's such a sweet site. We could have such fun there, darling."

In dismay he stared at her. Fun. Did she think about anything except fun? She was like a spoilt baby, who saw a toy in a shop window and couldn't be happy till she had it. And this was such an absurd, such an expensive toy.

"Darling," she was saying, "we needn't build one at once if it would be too expensive. We could just get the land and wait till we had more money."

She explained to him what her plans were for the house: how many rooms there would be; how they'ld arrange the garden; what pets they'ld have. Patiently but wearily he

listened to her. Was there no limit, he asked himself, t her irresponsibility?

For he knew so exactly how it would turn out. A enormous trouble and inconvenience he would meet th instalments on that property, only to find long befor they were in a position to build, that she had lost all in terest in the house. She was just like a child in a nursery displaying for a few hours a child's intense concentrate absorption in a new toy, to lose next morning all interes in that toy for ever. That was how it would be.

And slowly, gently, persuasively he would begin to ex plain to her the impracticability of her scheme. He di not say it would be impossible for them to buy the land But it would be difficult, extremely difficult. There wer so many things they could spend their money on mor amusingly. One by one he produced his arguments.

But she did not listen. She had been standing at his side her arm through his, while she had babbled excitedly, bu the moment he began to bring forward his objections sh turned away, walked over to a sofa, huddled herself, dejected figure, in its corner, all the vitality and glow gone out of her. Her eyes were lustreless. Her lips wer pouted, and on to her husband, who knew well thes premonitory signals, there descended a depression infinitely denser than that which had settled when Sylvia broache her plan.

"Heavens!" he thought, "she's going to pull her stuff."

And when she did that . . . oh, but it was just impos sible. In his early days of marriage, when he had tried t reason with her, he had let her go her limit, and it had bee too much. She would not argue, she would not discuss

She withdrew into herself, was polite, pleasant, but behind barriers. You simply could not get at her. She would agree to everything you said. "Fine," she would say, "splendid." From the outside she would seem the perfect wife. But actually, she was so distant that there was no getting near her. She made life unbearable. She would keep it up as long as she was denied her way. Twice he had tried to be equally determined, but he had capitulated. Life on those terms was not worth having. Now, when he saw the mood coming, he gave way. It was no good trying to reason with her; she was not, he told himself, a reasonable person.

It was no good arguing about that house. If she wanted it, then she must have it. He stopped speaking, walked over to her, laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Will that house make you very happy?" he asked.

In an instant the light and gaiety and charm had returned to her.

"Darling," she said, "so happy."

And her arms were flung round his neck, and her face was lifted laughingly to his; her lips were parted. It was seven years since he had kissed those lips for the first time. There was still only one thing in the world he really wanted.

§

It meant debts, of course; more debts, more obligations, more instalments. But to his surprise Dick Vinning did not find that the situation worried him particularly. As a boy he had always symbolised debt as an immense burden that hampered you, weighed upon you, prevented you

from breathing. That was how debt was presented in sermons and in stories. But actually when the time came he found that you accepted it as part of the fabric of your life. You did not bother about it much. At the office he had not time. Things went too fast. Going down hill on a bicycle with the wind behind you is an exciting business. At home he had not the time either. Sylvia saw to that. She was so busy having a good time herself that every one who was associated with her could scarcely help having one as well.

He never had to bother about entertainment. She saw to that all right. For every evening, for every week-end, something was arranged. Bridge, dancing, a theatre, picnicing. He did in truth leave his office behind him the moment he stepped into his car at six o'clock. In ten minutes he would be home, and there would be Sylvia fresh and radiant and laughing. She would throw her arms round his neck and kiss him and, "Darling," she would say, "have your bath, get out of those hot things quickly. Your Tuxedo's ready. The Freshams are calling for us in half an hour." While he changed she would mix a cocktail and chatter about all that she had been doing during the day: whom she'd lunched with, whom she'd had tea with, the frock she'd bought at Mangin's, the Chinese porcelain she had coveted at Gump's. By the time he would be ready, the car would be at the door. And that would be the last he would see of Sylvia. She would lose herself in the crowd, abandoned utterly to this business of having a good time. She would be laughing and chatting with other people, taking them aside to confide secrets to them. If it was a dinner party she would be sitting at

the other side of the table. If it was a dance she would be surrounded by young men. She was always surrounded by young men, whom she called "Darling," held hands with and kissed occasionally. Her "beaux" she called them.

"Darling, you aren't jealous? You aren't so silly as to be jealous. I must have my beaux. I'ld feel old if I didn't. Me, with my three babies and all my wrinkles. And, darling, you wouldn't want me to feel old."

She was amazing, he told himself. One would never stand for it in an English woman, but then in an English woman it would mean something different. You couldn't judge them by the same standard. The American woman: what were you to make of her? Was she anything but a spoilt child? Had she a single idea in that pretty head of hers beyond the having of a good time; the good time to which, by the mere fact of being a woman, she considered herself without any effort on her part to be entitled? Did she see in marriage anything but a stepping-off place for enjoyment? Had she any conception of how much this good time of hers was costing him: in work and strain and effort? And would she regard it as any part of her duty as a wife to have any such conception? Would she? But then, what would it matter if she did? Did anything matter as long as they loved each other and were together? For however much fun these parties were, and they invariably were good fun, for if the Californian does not understand the art of having a good time then there is no one in the world that does, the best moment was always at the end when the last good-bye had been said, and he and Sylvia were alone together, when she would snuggle

up against him in the carriage, her head upon his shoulder, and "Kiss me," she would whisper.

They would always kiss the moment they were alone. Sometimes it was a drowsy comfortable kiss, the kind of kiss with which you tuck a child up for the night. And it was as a child that he would think of her, a child that was tired suddenly of its play. But often it would not be at all that kind of kiss. There would be a fever in her voice and upon her lips, and her fingers would clench tightly on his coat, as though all the evening they had been hungry to be clenched there. The ten minutes' drive home would seem an exasperating eternity of time.

He was terribly happy with her.

§

Not that there were not moments of self-questioning. Had there not been, it would not have been a human marriage. In the history of every marriage there is one moment when the whole edifice appears to rock.

To Dick Vinning that moment came in his thirty-seventh year, in the sound across a dinner table of an English voice; a voice that was low and a little blurred, a little rushed, a little indistinct; a voice that was not particularly musical, but that pronounced its "a's" as though an "h" followed them, and in the sound of that voice came with a sense of overpowering nostalgia the memory of everything he had abandoned fifteen years back. He remembered London, and its quiet squares, and the buses going down Piccadilly, the curve of Regent Street, and Whitehall, as you saw it from St. James's Park, a medley of min-

arets, in the lilac of a November dusk. And he remembered the English countryside; the honeysuckled hedges, and the Sussex downs, green and brown with the slow sun going over them, the windmills and the grazing sheep; the wealth and softness of those coloured counties.

"Am I never," he thought, "to see any of it again?" And he looked across the table towards the voice, towards a calm, oval face, its head coiled round in a helmet of brown hair; to brown eyes that were soft and kindly, below a high, clear forehead; to lips that were full and smiling; to cheeks coloured slightly by air and sun. "That must be a very sweet person," Vinning thought.

Directly after dinner he went across to her. There seemed no need between them for the conventionalities of conversation.

"You're English," he said. "It made me homesick to hear you talk."

"And doesn't it make you more homesick to know that in two months from now I'll be in London?"

She was at Cambridge, she told him, reading history, and had been left some money by an aunt—not much, too little to invest—that she had thought she would spend in travelling. So she had come out here. She had had a wonderful time. "I love America," she said.

But he did not want to talk about America. He wanted to talk about England, to hear pronounced in accents so long unfamiliar, the names he had not heard for fifteen years. Did she know the west country? he asked. Yes, she had been born in Paulton. Then she knew Bath. But

why, of course. And the Wiltshire villages, Lacock a
Corsham with its almshouses, and Pickwick with its y
low houses. And Sussex. Did she know Sussex?

Yes, she knew Sussex; slightly but not well; she h
stayed at Ditchling. Then she should know Westmist
Why, of course. That deep sunken road below the chur
—was there anything lovelier than that in spring tim
And Fittleworth; she had spent a week-end there once.

So eagerly did they talk together that he did not reali
that all the other guests had gone, and that Sylvia w
left alone talking with their hostess. He was reluctant
say good-bye.

"Look here," he said, "you've only two more days he
and I imagine that they are pretty well filled up. But
you're looking for any one to show you round San Fra
cisco I'll be very glad to."

She looked him steadily in the eyes.

"That's very nice of you," she said. "I'll be very grat
ful. To-morrow afternoon?"

Not that they saw a great deal of San Francisco, thoug
they drove for two hours through its climbing stree
northwards and along its cliffs to the Golden Gate; thoug
they had tea at the little restaurant that looks out ov
the clustering piers, and the shipping and the ferry boa
paddling their way across to Oakland. It was of them
selves they talked, of themselves that they were thinking, o
themselves and England: the England she was returning t
the England he was exiled from. And as they talked, th
voice of memory whispered wooingly. "You don't belon
here," the voice insisted. "Life may be very exciting, an

very new. But is it worth, do you think, all this frantic hurry about getting on in the world, about getting rich? We live such a little while. Do you think it's worth it?"

And he remembered a poem out of his boyhood.

"She bade me take life easy as the grass grows on the weirs
But I was young and foolish and now am full of tears."

And he thought of England: of how leisured and gracious life was there; gentle and quiet-skyed. He recalled the peace of it, and the beauty. And, "What am I doing here?" he thought. "In this foreign country: working myself to death to satisfy the caprices of a wife who has no object in life other than the having of a good time. What do I matter to her, really? I'm just the provider. Any one else would do as well. I am a stranger among strangers here."

The appeal of the soft-voiced woman at his side was very strong. The soft voice and oval face seemed to symbolise everything that he was exiled from. His emotion was so fierce that he could hardly speak.

"I think," he said, "that I shall go mad if I never go home again."

To-morrow evening her boat would sail. She was free; he could be. And there was upon him a heavy longing; if only he could go! If only he could win back to that lost tranquillity. But even as he longed, he knew the impracticability of that longing. How could he be free? He, who was bound hand and foot by bills and obligations. Sylvia might not really need him. He might be the provider for her, the meal-ticket man, that, and nothing else. And yet . . . he shrugged his shoulders. Practically, it

was impossible. He probably wouldn't be able to lay his hand on a thousand dollars. He was bound hand and foot by debts. He could not go without leaving an intolerable mess behind him. It was no use dreaming.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll never know quite what it'll mean to me to-morrow evening when I watch the *Logaric* sail."

Himself he never quite knew what it had meant. There was a mist before his eyes, his ears were deafened. It was in a mist that he drove back up the steep hill towards his house. From his doorstep he looked down upon the city. In the harbour the ferry boats were tootling, their lights moving backwards and forwards like a swarm of fireflies. England was six thousand miles away. "What am I doing here?" he thought. And there, threading its way among the fireflies was the large lit shadow of the *Logaric*. "It's taking a part of me away with it," he thought. And his heart was lead.

Sylvia was not in the drawing-room when he got back; as he came into her bedroom she turned eagerly from before her mirror.

"Darling, I feel all restless to-night," she cried. "Let's go some place."

Her eyes were shining, her lips were parted in excitement. "I wonder what she would say," he thought, "if she knew how close I had been to never coming back." But, "Hurry, darling," she was urging him; and there was nothing for him to do but to take his bath, and long before he had tied his tie, she was shouting through the door to him, "Dicky dear, if you knew how warm your cocktail's getting."

He had no time to indulge his sorrows. There was a table booked for them at the St. Joseph; and Sylvia was excitedly running her eyes along the menu.

"Darlingest, let's have all the most expensive things. I feel so gay to-night."

Their dinner began with caviare, and ended with a fois gras savoury, and things like plovers' eggs and truffles weaved their way between.

"If only this had been Chinatown we could have had shark's fin soup," she sighed.

Vinning laughed. It was so like her, that. The regret at not being able to get a thing both ways. She was still, in her thirties, as she had been in her teens, the harassed child fretful because it had not enough hands to play with all its toys at the same time. But as always she was the ideal companion; gay and affectionate and witty. Never had he known her more merrily kittenish.

"Isn't it fun being just ourselves?" she said. "When did we go out together last? Do you think we've had a meal together once in the last six months?"

He laughed, and supposed they hadn't.

"Which makes it all the jollier," she said. "We appreciate each other more like this."

And for the first time for many months all her gaiety and liveliness were displayed for him alone. She did not, as usual, spend half her time waving to acquaintances across the room. And when one of her beaux came across the room and asked her if she would dance with him, she shook her head. No, she was with her poppa to-night, she said. And they danced over half the dances, as they had when they had been engaged; her eyes were bright and her laugh-

ter silvery; and Vinning forgot his homesickness, and the lights of San Francisco shining faintlier to the decks of the *Logaric*. England was far away, and England was his home, but were he there would he not be more homesick for Sylvia's laughter than ever he could be here for the green fields and the leisured ways? One of his arms as they drove home was tight about her shoulders. But as they paused in the hall on their return it was wistfully that she looked up at him.

"It's been a happy evening, hasn't it?" she said.

"Very," he answered her.

"If only you knew," she sighed, "how terribly happy you make me. If only I could make you one half as happy as you make me. No, no, don't interrupt. I'm so seldom serious, that you must let me be really serious, when I am. And, darling, you do realise, don't you . . . I may seem just a flibbertigibbet running round among my beaux, and that it's just the crowd round me that I want, but, darling, if it wasn't for you . . . darling, you do know, don't you, that nobody could take your place?"

Her arms were about his neck, and the *Logaric* might well be a million miles away.

§

And the years went by, swiftly and pleasantly, without life altering very much for Vinning. There were new problems, of course; problems of children and education and careers. But at root it remained unaltered. The days devoted unremittingly to work, the nights, as ever, to that having of a good time; with the persisting framework of

debts and obligations. Every year he made more money, and every year he spent more. He never had any spare balance at the bank. When his eldest daughter married he had to sell out the property they had bought at Pebble Beach, the property on which they had never built, but whose value had been quadrupled. Sylvia was sad to see it go. "We could have built such a sweet house on it," she said. It had been bought at hazard and sold at hazard, but the whim had brought them several thousand dollars. Dick Vinning shook his head. Did she realise anything, he wondered, of the realities of life?

And the years passed and their sons went out into life, and they were alone again, he and Sylvia, though now in a much larger house, with the old life going on, the work, the bills, the parties. They were growing old. His hair was white and thinner. She was plump and there were pouches below her eyes and wrinkles about her mouth. But she was still the most vital figure at any party. There was still the crowd of beaux to "darling" and hold hands with, and still the best moment of every party was at the end when they were alone together; when she snuggled her face against his shoulder. And though they were close on sixty, it was not always, by any means, that it was the tired child that whispered, "Kiss me."

He was still terribly happy with her.

§

But the pace was beginning to tell on Vinning. There were odd moments of dizziness; of forgetfulness; when nothing seemed to be quite there; when the world around

him seemed to be unreal; moments that ultimately sent him to the doctor.

It was a long and thorough examination, and at the end of it the doctor shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Vinning, you've got to quit. You've got to retire from work."

"What's wrong?"

"Not much, not yet. But if you go on working as you do now I wouldn't guarantee you twelve months more."

"So that's that," he thought, as he walked away from the doctor's consulting-room. He was finished. The end had come to this incessancy of work. He had worked unceasingly for close on forty years, and there was not much to show for it. His children were well settled, but for himself and Sylvia there would not be a great deal left. There might have been, there should have been. But there had been so much extravagance. By no means all of their investments had turned out well. And now that he was retiring, he would have to surrender a good many of them, at a heavy loss. There would be precious little left for himself and Sylvia.

Well, and it had been her fault, he told himself. It was she who had forced him into these speculations. She who had been extravagant, with her insistence on a good time. And as he drove home he smiled ironically over the dramatic fitness of this curtain to their marriage. It was right that he should be able to say to her now, "I'm sorry, my dear, but you wanted it both ways, which is something that can't be had. You set a harder pace than I could keep. We'll have to amble along, I'm afraid, these last few miles." That was how he felt as he drove homewards.

But the moment he saw Sylvia that spirit of partial revenge completely left him. He was ashamed, horribly, that he should ever have felt like that. It had been uncourtly; it had been malicious. Sylvia had been so sweet to him. She had made so gay, so friendly a thing out of their life together. It was he that had failed her. He ought to have been able to have kept life facile and ample for her to the end. He had failed. And it was humbly, like some one making a confession, that he went across to her.

"My sweet," he said, "I'm afraid that I've bad news for you."

He told her.

As he talked she drew her fingers slowly, caressingly, through his hair. And when he had finished, she bent forward and rested her cheek on his.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's my fault. I should not have let you work so hard."

They moved him, those few simple words, more than anything she had ever said to him. It had never occurred to him that she could care for him in that way, for his own sake.

"My dear," he said, "I wanted to. I wanted you to be happy. I wanted you to have a good time."

She smiled wryly.

"Did you think that was all I wanted—just having a good time?"

He looked up at her, puzzled.

"Well, my dear, I don't . . . I mean . . ."

"You did. Ah, I see you did. Well, . . . why shouldn't you have? I gave you every reason for thinking it; but

if you knew . . ." She paused. Then more quietly, more slowly: "Darling, I wanted a good time, of course I did. Who doesn't? I'm gay. I'm lively. I like having people round me. It's the atmosphere I'm most myself in; but if you knew just how much of a sideshow it all was really." And again she hesitated as though at all costs she must choose the right words to explain her meaning. "You see, my sweet, I knew you, and I knew America. I knew that in America one's got to be one of two things; a failure or a success. And I wanted you to be a success; for both our sakes, for our children's sakes. And I knew, because I loved you well enough to understand you, just how easy it would be for you to fail here. You're lazy, you know. You'ld have found it terribly easy to have wasted your afternoons on golf and gin. If you had, I knew just how you'ld go under. I resolved to save you at any cost from that. I said to myself, 'He's honourable. If he's incurred obligations he'll see them through. If I can so tie him up with bills that he must work, then he will work.' I encouraged you to be extravagant.—I forced you into all those complications. It wasn't just for the sake of having a good time. I wanted that, of course. But it wasn't only that. And that good time: it was for your sake as much as mine, every bit as much as mine, I wanted it. I wasn't going to let you be worried about the office when you were at home.

"No, no, darling, don't interrupt. I know what you are going to say. Was all that necessary? Couldn't we have been happy without all that, just ourselves together? My sweet, of course we could. If I could have been certain of you, that's to say. But I couldn't be. I loved you so

much. I was afraid of losing you. And I knew that a time would come, oh, no, it wasn't another woman I was frightened of, I could hold my own against another woman though it would be in the shape of another woman that I guessed the hit would come. It was England I was jealous of. You were an exile here. And by wondering how I should feel if I had to leave America, I knew just what that must mean to you. I knew that a time would come when the longing to go back would be greater than your love for me; as it was, darling, wasn't it? Oh, yes, I know; just for a little while it was. I had to be prepared against that time. And how better could I be prepared than by making it impossible for you to go; by making your life so involved here that you'ld have to stay? 'He's an honourable man,' I said. 'Whatever he might be tempted to do, he would never leave a mess behind him.' I was right, my dear."

Her eyes were smiling, and very fond.

For a few minutes he could not trust himself to speak. To think that all these years she had been that!

"I don't know what to say," he whispered. "Only that . . . well, I don't feel that I've failed you so badly after all; that you won't be quite so wretched leading a quiet life with me."

She laughed. "I'ld never be anything but happy with you, but there's no need for it to be quite as quiet as that. I've been prepared for most things. I've been prepared for your retiring as well."

In an evening of many surprises this was the most complete.

"Prepared; but, Sylvia, how can you be?"

She had never had more than a bare allowance of her own. Saved, how could she have? "I don't understand," he said.

She smiled.

"Have you forgotten all that jewellery?"

"Why, you're not going to sell that; and besides, you've given the greater part of it away; what's left wouldn't bring you much. You can never get more than a quarter of what you pay, if that."

"For real jewellery, my dear."

There was an enigmatic smile upon her lips. Never in his life had he felt more blank. "I don't understand," he said.

"No? not even that oldest trick out of de Maupassant? Well, suppose, then, that you were a jeweller and some one came to you and said, 'I want a fifteen-dollar imitation necklace, but if you'll make out a bill charging five thousand dollars, I'll give you a hundred dollars for that dud.' What would you say?"

He gasped. So that was how it had been done; and she must have saved. . . . Oh, but he had no idea how much he had spent on jewellery for her during their forty years of marriage. Enough, anyhow, to free the last remaining years of his life of any worry.

And there at her breast was gleaming an immense brooch that he had believed to be sapphire, and round her neck were the heavy strings that he had believed to be pearls, and on her fingers and at her wrists were glittering the white stones that he had taken for diamonds.

"They are all sham," he gasped.

Her lips were smiling; and suddenly that smile was

against his lips, and about his neck the jangled bracelets were pressed tightly. "Darling," she was sobbing, "I'm the one thing you've gotten in your arms that's real."

§

He is over seventy now. You will see him a kindly, bowed, not undistinguished figure, pottering round Pebble Beach, gallerying a hole or two at golf tournaments, sitting in the club room afterwards over a slightly livened Canada dry. He will smile friendlily at you, but would rather listen than talk. His conversation consists in the main of questions. Only occasionally and on certain subjects will he be assertive. A knowing smile will come into his eyes when he hears younger men inveighing against the injustice of the Californian marriage laws.

"The American woman," he will say, "knows how to get her man. She knows how to keep her man. She knows how to make him happy. The woman who knows that, is entitled to anything that she can get away with."

CALIFORNIAN

X

It was during my first visit to Monterey that I met Joan Jordan.

She was twenty-two years old, with frank hazel eyes, an open smile, a sunny nature and a direct, straightforward manner that put you instantly at your ease. She seemed to me the expression of all that is best and freshest in American girlhood.

She was visiting in Pebble Beach and for three weeks or so we were continually in each other's company. We went on picnics to Point Lobus and barbecues in the Carmel Valley. We galleried golf matches at Cypress Point and watched the Pirates beat San Mateo at Del Monte. We were pretty good friends before the time had come for her to return to her home in Pasadena and for me to continue my journey down the coast to Salvador.

"See you in Europe soon," she said on our last morning. "I'll be over within a year."

Which is the kind of thing that one has said to one so often that I was surprised fourteen months later to find on my return from Martinique an envelope in her handwriting with a French stamp and a Paris postmark.

"I came over here with a party that I'm hoping to get rid of soon," it said. "Let me know when you'll be over."

I saw her two or three times that summer.

She was leading what she described as the typical American's life in Paris, the life of bars and dance clubs that Hemingway has written of in "The Sun Also Rises."

"It's a silly sort of life," she said. "But it's fun, at that; and for a little while: I just can't take Paris seriously. I feel differently about England. It's where most of us come from, after all. I don't care whether I see the Frenchman's France or not. But I do want to be a part of English life; I'll be quite different, you'll see, when I move over."

She had got it all planned out. In the autumn she was coming over to London: without her party. She would take a house or an apartment; and live quietly as a Londoner for a year; mixing with Londoners, leading a Londoner's life. "I'm sure," she said, "that that's the only way to see anything of English life."

"But do you know many Londoners?" I asked.

"One or two. And if I know one or two people I'll soon know twenty others."

Which in California she would. Which for that matter almost anywhere in the world she would. In most places the foreigner has only to appear with adequate credentials

to find himself accepted instantly into whatever society exists. In England it is a slower business.

It is not that the English are inhospitable or unfriendly, but that the fabric of our social life is differently arranged. Particularly in London.

I was born in London. My home is in London. I have spent a great part of my life in London but even so I find it difficult to explain what it is that makes London different from other cities. People may say that it is a matter of cliques. In a way it is. But it is not that so much, I think, as that the Londoner more than other townsmen arranges his life in a series of pigeon holes. Only about a tenth of one's friends know each other. One of the closest and longest known of my friends was, for instance, born within a few yards and a few hours of me. We went to the same house in the same school; we belong to the same club, we played football and play cricket for the same side. Our tastes and our positions in life are much the same. We meet on an average three times a month. Yet in the years that we have lived in London we have never met each other unexpectedly in any restaurant, at any party or in any theatre. We know each other as well as any two men can know each other. But when we ring up to arrange some meeting and find that we have no evening free for a week we have no idea what the other is doing during those six intervening days.

A Londoner's life is a very intricate mosaic of relationships. It is conducted almost entirely in private houses. There is no equivalent for the country club atmosphere; no central place where one meets all one's friends and to which one can introduce a new friend, confident that he

or she will be looked after. It is, in fact, because of this pigeon-holing of one's acquaintances, this leaving and being left to one's own devices, that life is more private and more satisfactorily personal in London than anywhere I know. But it makes London the loneliest city for the stranger in the world. I am never surprised to hear any one say that he hates London. And I could not help viewing with misgiving Joan's decision to take a house there. I could picture what would happen when she arrived.

The women who had known her in America on learning that she was in London would promptly get in touch with her, invite her to dinner, give her an amusing evening, tell her that they are at home on Sunday afternoons, though it would be well to ring up first, include her name in their list for cocktail parties and occasional lunches, and leave it there. I should give some parties for her and ask to them the people that I thought she would be most likely to get on well with. But though Londoners may say the first time they meet you: "Do look me up sometime," they will be astonished if you do. It is not usually till a third or fourth meeting that they do anything definite. And even those whom I should particularly ask to "do something about" Joan, would not, I fancied, do much more to begin with than take her address and remark that they would be having a small cocktail party soon and would let her know when and where. To enjoy London one needs four friends and forty acquaintances. Probably one does in any city. But in London the collecting of them takes a full six months. I was very afraid that for those six months Joan would find herself extremely lonely.

I did what I could to warn her.

"London's a funny place," I began to say. "You may not like it."

But she was not of the kind that readily accepts advice.

"If that happens," she said, "I'll catch the next liner for San Francisco."

She had to the full that unshakeable confidence in her capacity to run her life that is one of the greatest attractions of the American woman.

§

Her method of coming across was characteristic. Had she been an English girl she would have written to her two or three friends telling them that she was coming and leaving it to them to plan things for her. As an American she made her own arrangements.

"On Friday," she wrote, "I'll be coming over. And no doubt you'll be very busy and will say, 'Heavens, what am I to do with her,' but I'm not going to be a nuisance. So you needn't worry. In fact, I think I've arranged things rather cleverly. I've met over here one of your picturesque young Englishmen who don't seem to have anything to do except spend the allowance some ancestor earned for them. He's broke, of course, as all of those people seem to be. So I said to him, 'John,' I said, 'I want to be shown round London. Will you come over for three weeks as my secretary?' And he's going to. Don't you think that's a swell idea? I shall need some one to show me where to get my hair waved and my hands manicured and help me with all those other things you'ld be far too busy to bother

over. Then, by the time the three weeks are up I shall know my way about."

John was of a type with which England is over-stocked. He was a picturesque four hundred to seven hundred pounds a year young man with no occupation, no ambition and no credentials beyond a back-ground of antecedents, and a certain technique of living. As a secretary, however, he was admittedly efficient. Within twenty-four hours he was negotiating for the rent of a pleasantly convenient maisonette in Knightsbridge. Within a week his protégée was installed there. "Oh, well," I thought, "it may go better than I expect."

A month later it was certainly seeming to.

After the first fortnight during which Joan and I saw each other pretty well every day, I began to notice that as often as not when I rang her up with some suggestion she already had an engagement.

"You seem to be pretty busy," I said.

"Oh, yes, I'm beginning to find my feet."

I was curious to know with whom she was spending her time.

"Who are all these people," I asked, "that you're running round with?"

"Oh, I don't know. No one in particular. Just chaps."

"But where've you come across them all?"

She laughed.

"It's a funny thing," she said, "but do you remember that evening we went to the Green Lizard? I believe that I've met directly and indirectly more people through that one evening than anything else I've done."

I remembered it very well. It had been a jolly evening.

The Green Lizard is, as night clubs go, about as good a thing as London can produce in a Bohemian way; which is not perhaps saying much. Now that the drink regulations are rigorously enforced there is no chance for a night-club such as the Quadrant was seven years ago. The recognised restaurants have to keep the law and in self-protection they inform against any club that would be likely to hurt their trade. As a result there exist in London three or four expensive clubs like the Embassy which are really restaurants with a membership; a large miscellany called the Gargoyle which is nothing in particular but is rather fun, and two or three smallish underground affairs which usually associate themselves with some singer and remain alive as long as the particular singer's vogue. Apart from that there is nothing beyond a few unspeakable speak-easies. The Green Lizard was about the best of the underground variety. It was small, clean and inexpensive. One usually found somebody amusing there.

On this occasion we were greeted boisterously by a genial young man who had been at Oxford with my brother and whom I had met since intermittently.

"Come and sit at our table," he shouted.

His table was already crowded but we managed to find places at it.

"I don't know half of our names," he said. "You can introduce yourselves to one another."

Quite a little had been drunk, every one was fairly gay. There was dancing and every now and then some one would sing a song. At twelve a wine waiter came round to take final orders. At twenty-five minutes past twelve he

asked us to finish up our drinks. At twenty-five to one he swept away the glasses. The young man from Oxford sighed. "I'm not sure that things aren't better in New York," he said. "At any rate once you're inside a speakeasy you can drink till morning. I suppose there's nothing for it but to go sadly home."

"Unless," Joan suggested, "you all come back and have some drinks with me."

She made the offer in the same casual openhearted way that her father would, after golf at the country club in Pasadena.

Some thought it would be a good idea; some said they lived a long way out. The young man from Oxford murmured something about some work, but in the end yielded. Finally, four of us went back. I did not know by name or sight either of the other two. They seemed pleasant enough and we sat around, played the gramophone, drank some whiskey and at about two o'clock scattered to our various homes.

"Everything seemed to start from that evening," Joan explained. "One of the boys rang up next morning and asked if he could call."

"Which one?" I asked. "The one I knew?"

"No, one of the other ones. And we went to the Green Lizard. I got made a member, there were some people there he knew. A few of them came back afterwards, like the other night. And, oh, well, one thing leads to another. I'm going to have a party as soon as I'm properly moved in."

§

It was a curious party. The stage-management of it was admirable. So admirable indeed, that had Joan been a less nice person it would have seemed pretentious. But she was such a gracious hostess that it seemed natural to be drinking champagne at tea-time with trays of caviare and smoked salmon sandwiches littering every table. It had been billed as a cocktail party. But at about eight o'clock cold pies, salads and trifles began to replace the caviare sandwiches. We found ourselves picnicing on the floor. Later there was dancing. I left at about one. The party ended, I believe, at four. It was a whole lot of fun.

At the same time I had never before been to a party with quite that atmosphere. There were two or three of my own friends whom I had introduced to Joan. There were three or four rather dowdy middle-aged women, but for the most part the party was composed of well-dressed young men wearing familiar ties that one felt one ought to know but didn't. It was not so much the company that made the atmosphere of the party curious as a feeling of uncertainty as though nobody knew what they or any one else was doing there. One scrap of conversation I overheard that was in a way explanatory.

"Who is she, anyhow?" I heard one man say.

"Some rich American having a good time," the answer came.

Only Joan herself seemed completely self-assured. She moved calmly from group to group.

"It was a funny party, wasn't it?" she said to me next day. "I knew so few of the people when it began, and I liked them all so much by the time it was over."

"Knew so few of them?"

"Well, I knew about half, I guess."

"How did the others get in?"

"The usual way. By people ringing up and asking if they could bring friends with them. So of course I said, 'Yes.' I think London's such fun that way. I thought London would be stiff and awkward. But it isn't at all. I came here knowing practically no one. Now I find that I've just not got enough hours in the week to fit them in."

§

I saw little of her during the next month. I was in the country the greater part of the time, finishing a book. I was planning, as soon as it was done, to sail for Kenya. Joan, whenever I saw her, seemed supremely happy; brimming over with the excitement of a new experience. Her talk was full of the plays and places she had been to. "Joan seems to be having a good time over here," I wrote to a mutual friend in California. "Though of what that good time consists I am a little puzzled."

I might have guessed a little from a remark she made shortly before I sailed.

"I'm thinking of financing a cocktail club," she said. "Do you think it a good idea?"

"Only if you've some money you want to lose."

"I haven't."

"Then I'ld keep clear of it."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because there already is a very excellent cocktail club."

"There's room for another."

I shook my head. A cocktail club is of service only to members of a monied and leisured class. In the lives of the average occupied person it would be an unnecessary extravagance.

"The Five Hundred Club," I said, "has got all the pleasant people who feel the need for that kind of club. The people who'ld want another club are not the kind of people you'ld like to be mixed up with."

"I don't know what you mean by that. A lot of my friends say that they'ld join a club if one was started."

She answered snappily and very promptly she changed the subject. It was her weakness as it was her strength that she neither invited advice nor welcomed it. But from that moment I should have guessed what manner of world she was frequenting.

Every country produces its own brand of waster. England's particular brand has come of a good family, has been at a good school, has agreeable manners, an unearned and insufficient income and no guts. He sponges upon his friends, accepts dinners and gifts from middle-aged women; and has an inferiority complex about his worth which he conceals behind a patrician air of superiority. His own class sees through him at the third meeting, and has no use for him. He is forced to play the Triton among minnows. It is to this class that would belong the type of person who would be anxious to join a cocktail club, and would not be a member of the Five Hundred. Galsworthy has described this type, at its worst, in "Swan Song." And it is a type very well calculated to impress a foreigner; for a little while.

I should from that remark have been able to picture the

kind of world in which Joan was moving. But except for that one party I had seen her in my setting, not in hers. I imagined that the fulness of her days meant simply that her other friends had been more accommodating than I had thought they would be. Before I left for Kenya I gave a couple of farewell parties to which she came. I noticed that two or three women having now met her for the third or fourth time were exchanging telephone numbers with her. From Marseilles I wrote to a couple of them asking them to keep an eye on her.

§

I was away three months. For none of that time did I have a fixed address. A large mail was awaiting my return to Villefranche. There were in it a couple of vaguely dissatisfied letters from Joan. The kind of letters that make you feel that there is something wrong somewhere. There was a letter also from one of the women I had asked to keep an eye on her.

"I have seen your American friend once or twice," she wrote, "but, really, it was not easy. I asked her to a cocktail party and she brought a quite impossible person with her. I went to her house and it was too pathetic. You never saw such an appalling crowd of third-rate men and rotten women. They were all out for what they could get out of her. I felt sorry for her; she's nice; but the trouble is that one can't see her without getting involved with the most impossible people. You should have heard Janet on her."

There was a note from Janet.

"I've done my best for your young friend," she wrote, "but there are limits. I went to a party of hers where a quite awful person made extraordinary suggestions within two minutes of meeting me. I am afraid I have no patience with the type of American who thinks she can get away with anything, provided she gives champagne."

In London there were no two opinions about her; one or two people were sorry for her; but such reasonable people as knew her were agreed that they could not waste their time on her. Several felt that she was simply a cheap person who thought everything was for sale. "What can you expect," some one said, "of a person who hires an Englishman in Paris, and that kind of Englishman, to introduce her to English society?" (For that was what the story of John had been converted into.) "She's pretty, of course, and amusing; but she must be shoddy, or she couldn't go about with such shoddy people."

"I can assure you she isn't that," I answered. But I saw the impossibility of convincing anybody. I had thought, before Joan came, that it would take her some while to get on terms of intimacy with the kind of Londoners that she would care to know. I had fancied she might be lonely. But I had not realised that there is at hand an accessible and deceptive world that is very ready to take advantage of an inexperienced and monied foreigner. And that by making use in London of the social technique with which in her own world she was familiar she would get herself involved with it. For the social technique that is suitable to one town and country may be fatal in another. In California Joan had seen her father and her friends inviting back to their houses the

people that they met in clubs. And in London in the same spirit she had taken back to her home the people she had met in the Green Lizard. As a result she had got herself involved with the very people against whom Londoners erect their self-protective barrier of reserve. And so by the time she had got on to terms of intimacy with the Londoners with whom she was by birth and breeding allied, she had made it impossible, owing to her part in another world, to be accepted by them. It was a pathetic muddle.

I wondered how much she had realised it herself. Sooner or later she would, I knew. For she had too much good sense and too much natural decency to tolerate permanently a shoddy milieu.

How much she had realised it I had little means of knowing. I was on my way through to New York. I was only spending three days in London. It was Easter. And Joan was out of town for the week-end. Lunch the day before I sailed was all that we could arrange. She looked tired and depressed.

"Well," I said. "How's life?"

"Fine!" she answered.

But she did not give the impression that it was. And it was of America, not of London, that she wanted to talk. "When I heard you were sailing I felt just heart-broken with envy. You'll give my love to them all in California? Tell them I'll be coming soon."

"But I thought you'd taken that house for a year?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I've been away from home over a year. That's a long time. I don't want to become depayseé."

Which was as much as she, who would never admit to

a mistake, would say about her experiment of making a home in London. One other remark only did she make. "That friend of yours, Mrs. Carter,—a bit of a snob, isn't she?" she asked.

"I don't think so. Why?"

"Nothing much, except that she said that she was surprised to see a person like Teddy Wale at my house. When you think how pleased she'ld be to be entertained by my people if she came out west."

That was all she said.

Two months later, however, in California, I read the letter to a mutual friend in which she announced her intention of returning to America. "I'm tired of it here," she said. "It was fun to start with, but it's like breathing a stale air. I'm tired of people who do nothing themselves, who spend their time talking about what their parents did, who despise everything that is new and every one who's working. I want to be among people who're looking forward not looking backward, and the snobbery of it all sickens me."

I made no comment. There seemed none to make. I just thought of the pathos of this misunderstanding; of the impression that this girl had taken away with her of England, and the impression that she had left behind her there.

And I wondered to what extent this misunderstanding, the outcome solely of a lack of foresight, of an inability on both sides to appreciate different points of view, might not be symbolic of an international misunderstanding that grows hourly more alarming to those of us who regard the friendship of England and the United States as the sole

possible foundation for the world's welfare and continued peace. We misunderstand each other in the same way that members of a family misunderstand each other. On the surface our two worlds are similar enough. In consequence we do not recognise and take account of the vast though not immediately apparent differences. The Englishman going to America and the American coming to England is not prepared for those inelasticities of the social fabric that in the case of completely foreign nations he is invariably on the watch for. He does not trouble to feel his way. As a result he receives and makes a wrong impression.

Of all that I wondered as I read that letter from one who of all people in the world should have taken and left behind her happy memories.

MIDDLE-WEST

XI

A LONG sea voyage is popularly supposed to be the ideal setting for romance. Propinquity, idleness, a sense of irresponsibility throw the close-spun meshes of their net about one. That at least is what everybody says. Personally I have not found it so. The days have long since passed when I used to pace the deck of a ship on my first morning with an eager curiosity, wondering what manner of adventure was awaiting me. None ever came. I am excited now at the start of a long journey because I love the sea, because I love the life of ships, because I am curious about the places I am bound for. And when last spring I hurried down the platform of the Pennsylvania Station towards the observation car of the Airways Limited, I just thought "In two days' time I shall be in Los Angeles"; and when next morning a few minutes before we reached

Columbus the news came down the train that the weather was too rough for flying, I did not wonder whether this change of plan might not bring compensatingly some amusing meeting, I said, "Oh, heavens, a day's delay." And it was impatiently that I walked up and down Dayton platform, knowing that at that moment if plans had gone to schedule I should be high over Indianapolis. For ten minutes I walked up and down the platform, then turned back towards my carriage.

In the doorway a young man and a girl were standing. He was about twenty-seven; handsome and well-dressed, with a nice mouth and a weak chin. She was probably three years younger. She was tall with a dark hat pulled low over dark eyes. They were not talking. They were just standing there, her hand in his. Quite clearly they were lovers parting.

I turned away, with my heart tightened. We all feel philanthropic about something; about homeless dogs, or ill-health or abandoned mothers. For myself it is when I see lovers separating that I want to start doing things; interviewing parents, signing cheques, setting people up in hat shops. "One ought to be able to do something," I thought, "somehow." A couple of minutes later whistles were screaming and porters were taking up the yellow stepping boards.

The lovers were saying good-bye as I turned back. It was a pretty and pathetic picture. Their kiss was such as children might exchange, a bare touching of the lips. But his thumb was pressed against her hand so that the flesh whitened round it. Another minute and the train had started. It was he that had been left behind.

She was seated in the half-section opposite to mine. Her mouth was trembling and she kept dabbing at her eyes with a soiled handkerchief. She was as forlorn as anything that I have ever seen. I wanted to speak to her, to say something that would console her, but knew there was nothing I could say. "Oh, well," I thought, and picked up my book and began to read it.

When I looked up from it, she was powdering her face in the half-section mirror. Our eyes met in the glass and hers smiled at me.

"That's better," I said.

She laughed.

It was a jolly, girlish, friendly kind of laugh.

"I've got to put some kind of a face on things if I'm to hold down that job that's waiting for me in Indianapolis."

"Are you applying for a post?" I asked.

She shook her head. No, she explained. For two years now she'd had a job in Indianapolis. She'd been due back at it that morning at nine o'clock. But getting there would have meant leaving Dayton before six. Over night she had intended to. But when five o'clock had come she'd just felt she couldn't. "It's three months since I've seen him, after all. And heaven knows when I'll be seeing him again. But what they're thinking about me in Indianapolis is just nobody's business."

"You haven't telegraphed?"

She shook her head.

"I thought of it. But then I thought if I telegraph they'll just say, 'That's pretty casual of her,' and be angry. But if I don't cable they won't know what's happened

to me. They'll think something may be wrong, they'll start worrying. Then when I do turn up they'll be so relieved that they'll forget about being angry."

"That's shrewd."

"I'm shrewd all right. If I weren't shrewd I wouldn't be in charge of a department with five girls under me."

And she began to tell me about her work, about the other girls, of the jokes they shared.

"You don't seem to have a bad time," I said.

"I have a grand time."

"Half an hour ago it didn't seem too good."

She laughed at that.

"And how!"

"I felt so sorry about it. I wanted to say something."

"I know you did."

"But there didn't seem anything to say."

"That's why I wanted to talk to you. Because you knew that. Here's some one, I thought, who knows what it's all about; some one else who's stood on a station platform, feeling that he's saying good-bye to everything that makes life worth living."

She looked questioningly at me. Confidences can be exchanged very easily in trains and in hotels between people who do not know each other's name, and are unlikely ever to meet again. But somehow I felt that there was no need for confidences between us; that already we knew all that was essential to be known about each other; that we could talk in shorthand.

"What's stopping you from marrying?" I asked.

"Our own silliness, or at least . . . well, I suppose it is."

It was a familiar enough story. Parents raising objec-

tions. His saying that there was more opportunity for him in New York; deciding he would go there and prove himself; promising that within a year he would have made a sufficient position for her to come out and marry him. She staying behind to work in Indianapolis. Then the stock crash coming; everything going badly in New York, with him making barely enough to support himself. "I could, I suppose, go out there and get some kind of work myself," she said. "But after the things my people have said to him he's made it a point of pride to be able to support us both. We ought, of course, to have married right away, and gone out there together, each paying a share. But he was so certain that he'ld make good there quickly. And now that we've once begun this way . . ."

I nodded my head.

"One makes that first mistake," I said, "then one's caught up in a series of complications that there's no avoiding."

"And it's just weakness, that first mistake."

"When you look back you know quite well that you'ld behave in exactly the same way again."

It was a situation that irresolution had created, that irresolution was continuing, and I knew just how inevitable for certain natures that first moment of irresolution was.

"You see him once in two months or so?" I asked.

"Not oftener, we can't afford to. We meet somewhere like Dayton or Columbus, some half-way house. Neither of us has the time to go the whole way. And it's so difficult. We write letters, of course; most days; and we have long-distance calls once a week or so. But each time we

meet, we feel like strangers. We have to go such a long way back to find each other. And at the end we've only got to where we'd been at the end of the time before. We don't seem to be getting any further. And there's so much to be got to. I'm so sure of that: it's hard to explain, but there's surely a kind of intimacy, a oneness that all this is the gateway to. If we don't hurry we'll never reach it."

She paused.

"My people and my friends all tell me that I ought to give him up," she said. "They say that I'm wasting my life. That nothing can come of it. He thinks that too sometimes. There are times when even I think so and I meet some one else I rather like, and wonder. Then I meet him again and I just know that wouldn't do."

"I know," I said. "You tell yourself what's the wise thing for you to do, and then your eyes meet across a room and you feel that nobody else in the room is there. You've a feeling of homecoming, of being where you belong."

She smiled.

"Yes, that's more or less how it is," she said. And we sat there talking, as the train rattled its way through the Middle West, and the rain dashed itself against the window.

For me that talk had a quality that was completely new. To exchange confidences with a stranger is a common experience for a traveller and to fall in love at first sight is something that comes now and again into most men's lives. But I, who have no sister, had never known that consciousness of complete oneness with some one for whom I did not expect ever to feel love.

And so we talked and talked, until suddenly there was a crunch of brakes, and the "Yes, Sir" of the Pullman porter.

§

For the remainder of that day I dawdled slowly through frequently stopping trains towards St. Louis and the next day with the sun shining and a keen wind blowing gustily we cannoned from air pocket to air pocket over Kansas. I had bought on my last afternoon in London a motion-picture camera. At the point when I felt that I could no longer squint down its narrow aperture I handed it across the coach.

"I'm tired," I said. "If you see anything worth taking you might shoot."

An hour later in the brief interval between two spasms of nausea I rallied to find the camera directed at my anguish. "You've been the most amusing thing we've seen so far," my fellow passenger expostulated.

I closed my eyes. When I opened them again we were in Wichita.

I suppose it is unlikely, for I recognise that I am not stomached for transcontinental flights, that I shall see Wichita again. Perhaps I am fortunate in that. Perhaps it would have been less lovely a second time. Perhaps it is better to carry away the memory of that spring drive from the airport through the green tree-shaded avenue to the one main street. Very fragrant and calm it seemed after six hours of buffeting by air. The little bungalows along the roadway, with their long chairs set upon the porches and the kind-eyed people lazing there with the

air warm and scented and the radios playing, had a feeling of south-sea idleness.

The impression lasted, as we flew that evening through the sunset with the wind calmed, over the rich fields of Oklahoma.

As a result I think of Sinclair Lewis' novels, the word "Middle West" has come to symbolise in Europe hardness and prejudice and a narrow way of life, with Mrs. Jones trying to go one better than Mrs. Smith. But nothing could seem further from that popular corruption than these tranquil places. And while that memory is green, I shall find it hard not to picture in gentle terms the kind of situation that the conditions of small town life creates; symbolising that life not in terms of animosity and jealousy, but in the story of a husband returning home one night to come across in his wife's desk as he searches for some sealing wax an old diary, and opening it without compunction.

Without any great curiosity he would turn its pages. Dear Mary, he would think as though, after fifteen years of marriage, her heart or mind could hold a single secret from him. Negligently he would read the first entry that his eyes chanced on.

"Wednesday, September 17. Micky had a headache this morning, which rather worries me, for he has not been at all well these holidays. And I don't like to send him back to school unless he is thoroughly fit.

"If he is not better to-morrow I shall send for Dr. McMurtrie. I went out shopping in the morning, but could not see anything I particularly wanted, so I bought Ralph a tie.

"Lunched at home with the boys, and in the afternoon took them to the movies. We saw a film with Bill Hart in it. I thought it very exciting. But Micky said that he was bored with Wild West films.

"We dined with the Williams. The Curtises and the Merivales were there. Quite a good dinner. But there was too long a gap between the soup and entrée. On the whole a happy day. I wonder if there will be a letter for me to-morrow."

He would smile indulgently. How typical that was of Mary. How completely those few lines expressed her.

The mother worried because her son was ill; the wife buying her husband a new tie; the hostess noticing the little mistakes in the running of another house; the friend wondering if any one had written to her.

A loyal, devoted, unselfish woman. Could a man look for a better, for a worthier wife?

There was a photograph of her above the desk, and his eyes rested fondly, gratefully, upon those familiar features. The broad forehead, the clear, steady eyes, the firm, full mouth.

There were some faces that were like masks, inscrutable and enigmatic. But those regular and friendly features were like a mirror that reflected Mary's nature as completely as that single entry in the diary.

There were times, of course, when he had felt inclined to regret that simplicity—the simplicity that allowed her to enjoy the kind of film that her children had outgrown. There were times when he could have wished her a little more unexpected. One could not, though, have a thing both ways.

Mary had been a wonderful comrade to him, and he knew that there was not a woman in the world he would exchange her for. With a tender smile he read through the next day's entry in the diary; through the simple account of sixteen hours' doings, down to the last sentence:—

"No letter for me to-day. Such a disappointment."

This second reference to a letter puzzled him. He had never known that she took much interest in her correspondence. Had never known that she had any correspondence to take an interest in.

Of what after all did the mail of any one living in a small town consist? Bills and advertisements for the most part, with an occasional short note scrawled on a half-sheet of paper. You didn't in these days of telephoning bother to write "newsy" letters to people who lived within a few yards of you.

And, for the rest, Mary's parents were dead. She only heard occasionally from her brother; never, except for Christmas and birthdays, from her other relatives. Except when he was away, and the boys were at school, there was no one from whom she could be expecting the kind of letter one could become excited over.

It was odd that there should be these two references to a letter. Probably there would be something more further on.

There was.

"Oh, I am so excited!" the next day's account began. "Actually three letters. Shall I ever get over it? The whole of life seems different. This is, I think, the happiest day that I have ever known."

The happiest day that she had ever known. He was more than puzzled now. He was alarmed.

What could this correspondence be that could plunge her into such despondency: that could transport her to such delight? The happiest day that she had ever known. With impatient fingers he turned the pages of the diary in search of further clues to this mysterious correspondence.

As a search it was simple enough. On practically every page there was some reference or other.

"Will there be a letter to-morrow? No letter again to-day. A disappointment. Surely there must be something for me to-morrow. . . ." "Ten days and not a letter. . . ." "At last. Oh, and such a letter. I do not know what I have done to deserve such happiness."

Reference after reference. But not a single clue to the nature of the letters; not a single clue to the identity of the writer. The diary was a bulletin of facts.

In the same way that Mary had written "Lunched out at the Williams"—without giving any account of what was said there, so had she written "a letter this morning"—without giving a hint as to its contents.

Impatiently he tossed the diary on to the desk, and began to ransack the drawer in which he had found it, for its successor and predecessors. Again the search was simple. The drawer was full of them.

He glanced rapidly at their dates. '28, '23, '26, '22. For years, apparently, she had been keeping, unknown to him, this record of her life. For years. It was useless to go back too far into past history. He had better find the most recent one, and make what he could of it.

It was the last he turned to. And as he took it out, he was conscious of an oblong projection through the flimsy leather. "A pocket," he thought. "I wonder what she's been keeping there. Some keepsake or other, I suppose."

As he slipped his fingers into the pocket he half expected to find in it a heart-shaped locket with a photograph. To his surprise, however, it was a key. A small key with a brass label attached, on which had been stamped the number 89.

He turned it over curiously in his hand. What on earth could she be wanting with a key like that? In the hope of finding an explanation he searched in the pocket on the other side.

It was there all right, but at first he did not realise that he had found it; did not recognise as a clue the small piece of printed paper—the receipt form by which a certain Mrs. Jocelyn Jones in return for the sum of ten dollars had been loaned for a year by the authorities at Angel Cross the right to P.O. Box No. 89.

For a moment he stared at it incredulously. Then suddenly, calamitously, he understood. Poste Restante. A Post Office letter-box under another name from which Mary could fetch those letters that she did not dare to have addressed to her own home. For years his wife had been conducting a guilty correspondence.

The diary was a plain enough piece of evidence now.

In a temper of mingled incredulity and anger he read line by line the sorry document. Oh, but there was no doubt about it. Hardly a day had passed without some reference or other.

"Another letter to-day! How happy I am! I have

read and reread it a dozen times. It is a dull grey day, with a wild wind and a little rain. And every one walks shivering about the streets. But I—why, I feel as though the sun were shining and the sky were blue. What would the world be for me without my letters? They are my very life."

Her very life! It was outrageous. All these years she had been deceiving him; all these years, while she had been posing as the loyal wife and mother, she had been living a double life under another name; while she had been sitting at his table, entertaining his friends, discussing his business, her thoughts had been buried incessantly in another man.

That was what she had been behind her mask; feverish with anticipation for the next day's mail, blissfully happy because she had been written to, gloomy and depressed because she hadn't.

And yet, all the while above that turmoil of emotion, she had maintained the smiling expression of a simple trust. The baseness, the hypocrisy of it. He was so angry that his fingers trembled as they turned the pages.

As he read on, however, his anger was displaced first by wonder, then by frank curiosity. In spite of the discovery of the key he was still as much in the dark as ever. He had no clue to the writer's identity, nor as he read on, could he find any reference to any meetings between Mary and her lover.

There were no plans for meetings, no wishes for meetings. Nor did he see, so crowded did this record prove her days to have been, when she could have found any opportunity for them.

Presumably the writer was living some way away, otherwise there would not be this necessity for correspondence. But surely, if they cared sufficiently for one another to maintain this fevered correspondence over so many years they would have made some attempt to see each other.

It might be, of course, that this other man was no more free than she was, that there existed between them one of those impossible situations for which there was no remedy.

It might be that he was a man with whom she had been in love in childhood, whom she had misunderstood or been unkind to, and now regretted. It might be that he was a man she had met on some journey somewhere, had felt an irresistible affinity for, but from whom the chances of life had permanently divided her.

It might be that. It might be. But the betting was a million to one against. It was all very well to read about those unrequited loves that can last a lifetime. But in point of fact love needed a more sustaining nourishment than memories and dreams. In all human probability his wife was conducting, and had for years been conducting, a subterranean intrigue.

With whom, though? That was the point. With whom? Till he knew there would be no peace for him.

And there in his hand lay tantalisingly the key that would unlock the mystery. He had only to go down to the post office, open Mail Box No. 89, and possess all the evidence he stood in need of. It would be the simplest matter in the world.

Nevertheless, it was a job that he recoiled from. To spy upon a person, even if it was upon a guilty wife, to open letters that were not addressed to him; it was not the kind of job he fancied.

All the same he had to know.

Dubiously he turned through the pages of the diary. If only he could solve the problem without having to resort to that squalid expedient! If only there were some clue. But search though he would, there was nothing but the record of those varying moods of gloom and exultation.

"Another letter to-day. How marvellously happy it has made me. How excited I felt as I turned the key in the lock. I felt like Emma Bovary stealing out of her house in the early morning to see Roger, rushing to Rouen to meet Leon.

"As a girl I always envied Emma. She may have died wretchedly, but she had known rapture first. She was so real to me that I could never believe that she was a character in a book. Perhaps she isn't. Perhaps one day we shall meet and talk together. I feel sure, very sure, that we should understand each other."

That was the last entry Ralph Whitehouse read. It settled him. Emma Bovary, indeed, and himself as the ignoble Charles!

It was too much. Spying or no spying, he was going to find out the man's name.

§

Half an hour later he was standing in the small back room in the Post Office, and as he searched the long row of boxes for No. 89 he was able to appreciate the kinship of guilt that Mary had claimed to feel with Emma Bovary.

He felt something of a criminal himself in that hushed room with this row of numbered boxes, each preserving its anonymity and its secret; these boxes that had been

taken each one of them for reasons of convenience and security; for some cause that separated its owner from the ordinary flow of citizens who were content to have their letters delivered morning and evening in their own homes.

In the life of any one who possessed such a box there must be some exceptional circumstance, usually a guilty one.

And as Ralph Whitehouse turned the key in the lock he felt not unlike a schoolboy breaking bounds, who expects every moment to see the shadow of authority flung upon his path.

A moment later he was endeavouring with no great measure of success to rally under the biggest shock that he had received on this day of shocks.

He had thought that the discovery of the key had armoured him against any secret that the box might contain. He had come prepared to find the handwriting of his oldest and closest friend. Nothing, however, had prepared him for the shock of discovering within the box eight letters, each of them addressed in a different handwriting.

"Eight lovers!" he gasped. "Heavens, but what a woman."

He had no scruples left now about the dignity or indignity of spying. He could scarcely restrain till he had driven from the Post Office the impatience he felt to tear open those guilty envelopes. Oh, but he knew what he would find!

"My darling," the first letter began. "Your photograph arrived last night. It has made me so happy, so more than happy. It is as exquisite as I knew it would be. It is

propped up on my desk before me as I write. If only fate had been charitable, I tell myself, if only it had allowed us a real union instead of this distant loving . . . if only, my dear, if only . . ."

There were four pages of it, all in the same key, and Ralph Whitehouse did not bother to read through it to the end. Why should he weary himself with such stuff?

He knew where he was now, knew what his wife was like now. The other letters were scarcely worth the fatigue of opening. He knew what manner of things they were. The second was in French—an outpouring of protestations and regrets.

"If only . . . if only . . ."

That was the burden and motif of the thing. He crumpled it up impatiently into a ball. The third bore an Italian postmark.

"The days are long and I am lonely. Your letters mean much to me, so much more than I can ever say. But is there never to be anything but letters between us? We could be such friends, such lovers. I am certain of that—certain. Am I never to see your face, never to hear your voice? Is such a monstrous injustice possible?"

It was casually that Whitehouse had set himself to read the letter, so casually that at first he did not appreciate the odd significance of those self-pitying sentences.

It was not till he reached the words "never to hear your voice" that a curious ring in the phrasing of that plaint made him pause, made him look back, made him re-read the letter.

"Never to see your face, never to hear your voice." That was not the way one wrote to a lover one was divided from.

It might be, of course, that the word "again" had been omitted, but as it stood the letter certainly gave the impression of having been written to some one that the writer had never met.

"It's odd," he thought, "extremely odd. From the handwriting you wouldn't imagine him to be a careless writer. And if he hasn't left out the word 'again' . . ."

"I wonder," he thought, "I wonder."

As he read on, carefully now, and with every nerve alert, the certainty grew upon him that the writer of that letter had never set eyes upon Mary in his life.

How else could one explain such an outburst as "I wonder, my dear, what you are like. Every night when I go to bed, every morning when I wake I try to picture you. Your letters are so lovely. Are you lovelier than they?"

There could be no other explanation. Somehow or other Mary had contrived to launch herself upon this sea of words with a man whom she had never met.

How she had managed to do so he scarcely set himself to wonder. For all he knew she might have rung up telephone numbers on the off-chance of hearing a voice that pleased her. She might well have done. Nothing in this reversed world seemed too impossible to have happened. By the time he had read the letter through he was prepared for anything. He had passed the stage at which speculation could be held to be of profit.

He had not long to wait for the explanation.

"Dearest," the next letter started. "Your sweet, sad letter has just arrived. I know certainly how you feel; how the tedium of monotony and hopelessness of life weigh on you. I wish I could do something to make that burden lighter for you. If only circumstance had not

come between us. But it is something, surely, this intimacy, this friendship of correspondence. Certainly to me it is. I never dreamt that I should find such a friendship till I put that advertisement in *L'Allure*.

"To think of it, just a line, 'Am lonely and in search of a congenial spirit,' put casually in a paper like *L'Allure*, a paper which is no more, I suppose, than the medium through which the lowest of creatures arrange the lowest of human lives. To think that an advertisement like that should have brought to birth so exquisite a flower!"

An advertisement in *L'Allure*. That cheap, illustrated rag which he had seen during the war stacked at every kiosk on the boulevards for the sale of its dubious jokes and the equivocal advertisements of lonely widowers seeking comfort and distressed damsels asking for material sympathy.

He had often wondered who replied to that kind of thing. Now he knew. Women like Mary did; women who found life tedious were able to use those columns as a magic carpet to a dream world of romance where they could imagine themselves to be an Emma Bovary.

A dream world of escape. For that, he was very certain, was what it had been for Mary. He read the letters through carefully, one by one. There was much that surprised him; a little, particularly in a letter that appeared to be from a woman, that embarrassed him. But this, at least, was clear. She had never allowed, never considered the possibility of allowing this dream world to overlap the world of actual experience. She had never met, she had never tried to meet, any of her correspondents. She had lived with them as Emma Bovary, in a dream world of intrigue and exultation. Side by side she had ridden

the horses of her double lives, and without him or a single one of her friends suspecting it.

All these years, he felt, he had been living with a strange woman.

Pensively he fingered the letters and then looked up at the photograph that stood above the desk.

There are some faces that are like a mirror, that seem to reveal and express completely their owner's personality. But the regular friendly features, the broad forehead, the firm, full mouth, the clear steady eyes that looked out at him from the frame were like a mask, inscrutable and enigmatic, concealing heaven knew what mysteries beneath their bland exterior.

Through the open window from the road outside there came the grunt of a car drawing up outside the house; a pause, then the bang of a closing door, the soft sound of footsteps that paused outside the door.

As his wife opened the door he gasped.

She was wearing a tailor-made costume in which he must have seen her innumerable times, every detail of her pose as she came forward into the room, slowly and a little flushed with walking, must have been long ago familiar to him; must have been. He did not know it, though.

As those clear, steady, searching eyes met his he was overwhelmed by a new and shattering experience.

He felt himself to be meeting for the first time a new and strange and infinitely seductive woman, with whom he felt himself, at an age when he had thought himself to have said good-bye to romance forever, breathlessly and exhilaratingly on the brink of falling desperately in love.

NEW ORLEANS

XII

THROUGH the weeks during which Eldred Curwen and I wandered through the Caribbean, New Orleans was never for long out of our talk. It was the one city it seemed to us where we stood a chance of finding traces of the old French colonial atmosphere whose ruin we had looked upon in Saint Pierre and Cape Haitien.

"Don't you think," Eldred would say, "that we might be able to find a boat from Kingston?"

But somehow or other the boats never fitted, and it was not till a later trip when I was on my way back to England from San Francisco, that, in tourist parlance, I took New Orleans on my way.

It was disappointing. At least from the point of view of the intention with which I went to it. The narrow streets of the "vieux carré" with their handwrought iron

balconies, were dark and dirty with the sense of something drained and put aside. The shadow of Prohibition lay heavily upon it.

Antoine's may look like a French restaurant, but the atmosphere of France demands a *sommelier* to bend pontifically above a wine-list. And it was melancholy in the little walled-in patios to be able to order nothing stronger than near-beer.

It was a relief to cross over into the new town, where the streets are wide and lighted, where large houses stand back in long tree-shaded avenues; where the parks are full of young people bathing and playing tennis and you get that sense of life ahead of you which is the strong wine of the New World. On one side of Canal Street lies the past, on the other side of it the future.

I was glad to escape from the dark alleys into the broad, bright thoroughfares.

§

Half way down Canal Street, on the southern side, there is a large store, one window of which was filled with children's toys. As I passed a child's eyes were fixed gloatingly upon a model train.

"Oh, Daddy, isn't that a lovely train, do look!"

It was indeed a noble train; a six-wheeled train; just like the trains that the child had watched from the porch of his bungalow rushing over the metal tracks. It was a foot long and it was propelled by steam. If he had that train, he would never, he thought, want anything else in all his life.

"Couldn't I have it, Daddy? I'ld have such fun with it," he pleaded.

The large man at his side laughed boisterously.

"I daresay you would. And how much do you think it costs?"

"I don't know, Daddy."

"Thirty dollars, my son, and not a nickel less. And what do you think a chauffeur's wage is? Forty dollars, not a nickel more. And how many children have I got? Three. Let's be moving, sonny."

But the boy's eyes were cast lingeringly over his shoulder as they walked away. What fun he could have with money, he must have thought.

Broodingly my eyes followed him. By such a one in such a spirit it must have been that the present prosperity of New Orleans had been built out of the ruin of the Civil War and the crash of the plantation system. It is on the enterprise of young poor men eager for a more large way of life that the modern industrial world relies. I wondered whether that small boy whose eyes had dwelt so gloatingly upon that train, was destined in fifty years to be one of those with whom interviews would appear in the Sunday supplements—"How I worked my way up."

As likely as not, I thought.

In its essentials the story is invariably the same.

§

"There's only one way of making money," a schoolmaster will say, "and that's by working."

Every evening when he comes back from school he goes up to the bedroom that he shares with his two elder brothers, and spreads his books upon the table. There is too much noise going on downstairs. His brothers do only enough work to keep themselves out of trouble. Within half an hour they will be laughing and chattering and singing. He prefers to remain upstairs.

Sometimes his brothers will come up to him.

"Surely you've finished? Come down and enjoy yourself."

But he only shakes his head and smiles.

"I'm slower than you chaps," he'll say. "Takes me longer to get through the stuff."

And he will be left alone in the bleak bedroom till every date and fact of his history lesson has been memorised, till the position of every town and river has been fixed, till each sum has been worked to its logical conclusion.

Sometimes his mother will look at him anxiously.

"You don't look well, Chris. You're indoors too much, you ought to play more."

"I'm all right, mother," he'll say. "I play all I need."

But he never joins the groups of boys who stay behind after school to play football in the yard, and who go on Saturdays to the public park with bathing suits and tennis racquets. There are his books waiting him in the empty bedroom. At the age of ten he is in a class of which the average age is twelve. Two years later he is the head boy of the school.

On his fourteenth birthday his principal calls him back at the end of the morning's lesson.

"You'll be having to leave school soon," he says. "What do you think of going in for?"

"I don't know, sir."

His brothers have both left school. They are working as mechanics in a factory. His father has talked about finding a job for him in a garage.

His principal shakes his head at that.

"You've worked very well here. You're one of the best boys I've ever had. I wouldn't like to think of that work being wasted. You ought to go somewhere where you'll use your brain and not your hands. I'll see what I can do."

It is not a great deal that he can do. The post of office boy in Martin and Conway's cotton factory could have been filled by anybody with a tidy mind. There are telephones to be answered, letters to be stamped, parcels to be registered, messages to be run. The company estimates the value of his service at six dollars a week. His brothers are contemptuously disapproving.

"Call that a man's job, sitting on a stool all day and licking stamps? It's not even as though you were well paid for it."

They themselves are earning twenty and thirty dollars a week. They contribute to the upkeep of the family. They have joined a local club, and spend the evenings marking and registering billiard scores. They go to burlesques and baseball matches. On Sundays they wear flashy ties and walk out with girls.

His mother is concerned about his health.

"You look so pale. That air can't be good for you."

The concern and the disapproval alike he shrugs away.

"I'll be all right," he says. "I guess this'll lead to something."

By day at the office he answers enquiries and enters figures in large ledgers: his evenings he devotes to classes. He has learned foreign languages: French, Spanish and Italian. He studies history and geography, commercial history and geography; he knows what each country produces; how rich it is; how it maintains or fails to maintain prosperity. He knows what would be the effect on trade of an earthquake in Japan or a cyclone in the Antilles. He sees how the cogs in the machinery of commerce revolve.

Every evening after supper he will leave his home; the streets will be brightly lit; at their corners he will see groups of young people laughing and joking with one another. Through open windows he will hear the sound of gramophones; of people singing; of people dancing. Sometimes in the summer dusk he will see young people sauntering arm in arm down quiet streets; or in the sheltering angle of a wall, clasped closely in each other's arms.

"Darling, are you really happy?" his mother asks him. "You look so lonely. Isn't there any girl you care about?"

He laughs.

He is quiet and unadventurous with no spare pocket money. The figure that faces him in the looking-glass is pale and undistinguished.

"I'm not the sort of fellow that girls bother over."

His mother shakes her head.

"There's the right girl for every man," she tells him.

§

At the evening classes he sits next another ambitious and industrious young man. They talk together at their desk before the instructor has arrived, and afterwards they walk home together till their ways part. They discuss the evening lecture and compare each other's progress. They drift into friendship.

"Why don't you come and see us some day," the other asks. "What about next Sunday?"

He is eighteen. He has scarcely ever been to a stranger's house. He feels very nervous as he walks up the gravel path between the beds of yellow and red nasturtiums to the neat wooden bungalow. He compares it with the smoke-sooted house from whose porch he and his family look out on the metal tracks of the Southern Pacific. He becomes acutely conscious of his tie, his hat, his shoes. He would have turned and fled had not his friend's voice hailed him from the porch.

"Oh, there you are! So you've found the way? Splendid!"

In a moment his nervousness has been removed by the geniality of his welcome; by the mother's broad smile, the father's hearty handshake, by the warm-hearted friendliness with which the sister comes forward to him.

"I'm so pleased to see you. My brother's always talking about Chris Arkwright."

She is dark, vivacious, rather plump, with white skin and a full smiling mouth. She sits next to him at supper. She talks about his work, about his office, about his hopes. It is the first time that any one has taken any interest in what he is doing. At home his brothers and parents

are mildly, affectionately contemptuous of him because for all his work he earns less than they do.

"I've no use for any one who doesn't want to better himself," she says. "What are you aiming at? Have you decided yet?"

He shakes his head. No; not yet, there is plenty of time, he feels.

"I suppose so," she says. "But soon, you know, I think you ought to. You ought to set yourself a goal and work to it. It makes it easier. It's like running in a race. When you know the distance you know when to sprint."

She talks to him of her plans. She is learning typewriting and shorthand. She wants to become a private secretary. "I'm learning Spanish as well," she says. "A secretary who can speak Spanish is worth twenty-five per cent more to any firm."

She asks him what books he reads. Does he care for poetry? Has he read Tennyson? Oh, but he must. She will lend him hers. He looks dubiously at the volume. Poetry; is that any use, he wonders? "I've marked my favourite ones," she says. "Perhaps they'll be yours, too."

They talk as though they have known each other all their lives. "You'll come again," she says when he rises to take his leave.

§

One morning Mr. Martin, the senior partner, walks into the office into which Arkwright, with a two dollar increase of salary, has been promoted a year earlier.

"I suppose none of you speak Spanish?" he said. "I've got a cable through from Madrid, and Coke's away."

Arkwright raises his hand. "I do, sir."

Mr. Martin looks at him with surprise and interest. "Really, where have you learnt that?"

"At evening classes, sir."

"Evening classes? So? Well, let's see what you can make of this."

Arkwright translates the message. "That sounds all right," says Mr. Martin. "Thank you very much. Let me see, Arkwright's the name, isn't it? Yes, Arkwright. I must remember that."

He flushes crimson as Mr. Martin leaves the room. He is conscious of the heads turned towards him, of the glances anxious, appraising, envious and contemptuous. "Good Lord!" they are saying to themselves. "A fellow who goes to evening classes."

It is with a beating heart, however, that he carries the news that night to the little wooden bungalow where most of his spare time is now spent.

The dark-eyed sister claps her hands together with excitement when he tells her of it.

"How splendid, Chris. It's certain to mean promotion."

Next day Mr. Martin calls him into his office. Mr. Martin is large, florid, genial.

"Sit down, Arkwright. I want to hear something about you. I was surprised yesterday. I had no idea that you knew Spanish. I should have known, of course. One ought to know everything about the people who work for one. But it's difficult with a staff as large as ours. Tell me about yourself."

Arkwright tells him. Of his home, his upbringing, his

self-education, of what he is learning, of what he has learnt. Mr. Martin listens attentively. "So you can speak three languages. That's creditable. One wants more young fellows like you. You're the kind of man we want. Coke's been telling me that he's more work in the foreign department than he can tackle personally. He's been clamouring for an assistant. We'll give you a trial turn and see what you make of it."

The dark eyes glow that evening with pride and pleasure.

"I knew," she says, "I knew it was only a question of waiting. From the moment I saw you I knew that."

It is less humbly, less friendlily, that he announces the news to his parents. "This'll show them what I'm worth," he thinks. Their astonishment pleases him more than the girl's delight has done:

"What, thirty dollars a week," says his elder brother, "and because you can speak Spanish? Well, I'm blessed!" Then, after a pause: "Well, anyhow, let's go and celebrate this."

Arkwright shakes his head.

"I'm sorry," he says, "I've got a class this evening."

"Nonsense! You don't mean to say you're going on with that stuff now?"

"More than ever, now. I've only just begun."

§

A year passes.

He adds German to his list of subjects.

One evening as he is coming away from the class his friend, whose industry during the last months has abated a little, comes up and takes his arm excitedly.

"You've got to come home," he says, "the greatest news!"

"What is it?"

"Wait till we get back. My sister'll tell you; it's her idea."

Her eyes are gleaming eagerly.

"It's such luck," she says. "You'll not believe it. We've been left a business by an uncle; a grocery store back in Georgia; the only one in the town. We're all going there. Philip'll run it. I'm to help him, and Mum and Dad'll hang around to see that we don't make idiots of ourselves."

"What! Then you're leaving New Orleans?"

It is on a note of the most blank dismay that Arkwright puts the question. That they should be leaving town! He does not know how he is to endure life without them, without the warmth and friendship that they brought into his life.

"You're leaving," he repeats.

She laughs. A gay, happy, affectionate laugh.

"But not alone; not unless you want us to."

He stares at her. "What do you mean: not unless I want you to?"

Blushing she turns towards her brother.

"You explain, Philip."

"It's your plan."

"Yes; but you explain."

Her brother hesitates. "Well, it's like this. We wondered if you wouldn't care to come into partnership with us."

"Partnership? But I've got no capital."

"We don't want capital."

"It's your help we want."

"There's enough for all of us."

They are speaking one against the other, eager to convince him of the practicability of the scheme. They don't want his money. His capacity to make things go; his brains, his drive, they are his capital. With him they would make a success of it. They are sure they would. They produce figures and balance sheets to prove the soundness of the scheme. He must come in with them.

Pensively Arkwright listens. It is a sound enough scheme. There is money in the business. They would be able to enlarge a bit. There would be a living, a comfortable living in it. But to leave New Orleans, to bury himself in the country, to lose for ever the chance of success and a big career, to waste these years of work, and self-denial. He can't, it would be such a waste, such insane waste. He begins to make excuses. There is his work in New Orleans; his family.

"But you've got no obligation to your firm," they say. "Your people have got two boys. Do come, Chris. We'ld make such a success of it. We'ld have such fun."

But he is adamant. He wishes he could. He'ld give anything to be able to; but there it is. He can't.

"Oh, very well," says the brother at length, "if you won't, you won't."

When he goes the girl follows him into the hall. She looks him very steadily in the eyes.

"Chris," she says, "you realise, don't you, what this means? We'll be going four hundred miles away. We'll hardly ever be coming back to New Orleans."

"I know. I . . ." He hesitates and looks away.

There is a pause.

"So it's good-bye, then," she says quietly.

§

Life is difficult for Arkwright after they have gone. The sweetness and warmth have gone from it. To forget the loss of them he works the harder. He continues his evening classes. He stays later at the office. Now that he has a position of responsibility there is more for him to study, more for him to understand. He may only be a cog in the machine, but a cog may know how the other cogs revolve.

He does not spare himself. At the age of twenty-five he looks over thirty. There are lines across his forehead; his hair has begun to recede; his cheeks are sallow; there are dark rims beneath his eyes.

"Darling, you look terribly ill," his mother says. "You're overworking."

He is the only son living at home now. His brothers have married robust, honest-eyed wenches of their own class whom they have taken to homes such as they had been born into, to beget there such families as they have themselves been part of. They often come round to their old home with their wives and families. But they usually choose an evening when Chris is out. They find themselves embarrassed by this pale-faced, younger brother of theirs, who wears different clothes and speaks to them in a different accent.

Only his mother takes his side.

"He's ill, he's overworked, you must make allowances."

Arkwright laughs when she speaks to him about his health. "Don't worry," he says. "I'll ease up soon. I've got my good time coming. But it needs waiting for."

Not that he thought he would have so very long to wait. He was at work, for a year now he has been at work, on a detailed report on the firm's interior management. It showed how work was duplicated, how departments overlapped, how gaps were left; how economies might be effected in space and time and labour. His recommendations would, he calculated, reduce the overhead working expenses of the firm by one and a half per cent.

"If that report doesn't get me somewhere, nothing will," he thought, as he handed it to the secretary for delivery to the Chairman of the Board.

During the afternoon of the bi-monthly board meeting he could hardly control his impatience. Every time he heard a step in the passage or the ring of a telephone bell he fancied that it was the message summoning him to the board room. He waited, scarcely breathing, his pen poised upon his paper. But the footsteps passed, there was no pushing back of chairs in the telephone room. Slowly, minute by minute the afternoon wore away. He heard the secretary's feet in the passage. The board meeting must be over. He stared blankly at the calendar in front of him. Had they taken no notice of his report? Was his report worthless? Was he worthless? Were all those weeks of labour to be wasted?

When he walked through the main office a little later the secretary looked at him curiously. At the end of the

day he was accosted by one of the clerks, a large, broad-shouldered, football-playing fellow.

"So I hear that you're trying to get half of us fired," he said.

"I don't know what you mean."

"If drafting a scheme by which the business can be run by half the people who are at work here now, isn't trying to get half of us fired, I don't know what it is. People who were your friends, too. Gawd!"

Next morning when he comes into the office he is met by angry, suspicious, scornful glances. The news of the report has got round among the staff. The atmosphere of hostility is marked. He does not mind particularly. He had never been friends with any of them. They had never liked him. They had resented his industry, his ambition. They had hated him for being different, for wanting to be different from themselves. The actual recognition of the breach meant little to him. It was by the silence of the directors that he was worried. Had he failed? He can not believe that after all these years he should have failed.

The suspense is terrible.

It is a week before Mr. Martin sends for him.

"I didn't send for you before," he says. "It seemed unnecessary before I had settled things. There was a good deal to settle. A good deal to be gone into. There was a lot of meat in that report of yours. Lean meat. I don't say I'm taking all your recommendations. I'm not turning away people who've worked loyally for us. But there's enough sound sense in it for me to realise that it's time Simpson retired on a pension, and that the young man

to take his place is you. We'll celebrate it over a lunch table to-morrow. If you'll be ready at one, I'll take you to my club."

§

Mr. Martin is one of those Southerners, born of an old family with a superiority complex who seeing most men as their inferiors, do not recognise any shadow of difference in their inferiorities. He classed Arkwright with all those others with whom the conditions of commerce brought him into contact, and whom he would under no circumstances have invited to his house. Arkwright was a business acquaintance. As a matter of course he invited business acquaintances to his club. He had no conception, as he discoursed genially on the past, present and future of his firm's business beneath the floridly regal decorations of the Palladium Club, of the tortures of self-consciousness that his young colleague was enduring.

It was the first time that Arkwright had been inside a club. It was the first time that he had been brought into touch with rich people on terms of equality. During the wretched ninety minutes of that lunch he realised the vast gulf that separated him from those that moved in it. Everything about him proclaimed the difference. The cloth of his suit was shoddy; the set of it ostentatious. The tie and socks which he had chosen with such care were too bright. The timbre of his voice was boorish; now scarcely audible, now so loud that people across the room turned round. His hands were ill-groomed; the movements of them awkward. His carriage as he came into a room was unprepossessing. Ninety minutes of com-

parison told him this, proved to him that not only knowledge but a technique of living was requisite to success.

"I've got to learn," he thought.

He set himself to learn it. He took elocution lessons. He scarcely recognised the acquired articulation as his own. But the tone of the voice was pleasing. He learnt to dance so that his movements should be graceful. He had his nails manicured. He smoked so that he should have employment for his hands. He changed his tailor. He grew first a moustache and then a beard; a pointed beard and a moustache that curled backwards beneath his nose. His beard gave dignity to his face and courage to himself. It was a mask, an armour behind which he could retreat. It inspired respect in his superiors. His equals and inferiors it intimidated.

It intimidated his brothers. He was no longer the pale, stooping boy who would not play football. He was a different person; a successful business man. He saw little of them. That little was not too comfortable. They had not a great deal to say to one another. But he enjoyed the vindication of himself that was implicit in their timidity. He had a large box of presents made up for them every Christmas. A cheque accompanied the box. Each year the cheque was larger.

§

Not as much larger as Arkwright could have wished. The years were passing. He was thirty-five. His income at Martin and Conway's was becoming stationary. Because Martin and Conway themselves were stationary, he told

himself. The business was self-contained. There was no room for expansion. "It isn't big enough," he thought, and looked round for means of enlarging it. He waited there till a bad year came with the prospect of a worse one following. Then he started to make enquiries. He found a rich firm that was anxious to enlarge; he gave them facts, he gave them figures. He waited till the panic moment when a low offer was likely to be accepted, then he gave the signal to his new friends. The offer was made; a nervous board saw a chance of pacifying restless shareholders; the offer was accepted.

Not till the new company was formed had Mr. Martin any idea that his organisation manager was to be one of its directors.

§

Money begets money. You save and toil and scrape over years for a few thousand dollars. Then suddenly the corner is turned, and without effort, apparently, in millions it comes rushing in. It is like an avalanche going down a hill. Nothing can stop it. You become immersed in the business of making money. It is like a love affair. There is the hesitant prelude, the self-questioning, the pondering: "Shall I turn back while there is still time?" Then the step is taken. And you are lost. Love has become the sky above you and you the lake that is beneath it. You are the reflector of its moods. You are bright and gay, sad or laughing as the sun shines or refrains from shining. You are focussed upon one point.

Time does not exist within a love affair. Time does not exist for Arkwright during those years when he is

laying the basis of his fortune, when amalgamation follows amalgamation, when directorship after directorship is offered. Landmarks stand out. The hotel bed-sitting room that became an apartment; the apartment that became a house. The country cottage, the motor car, the chauffeur, the valet, the first photograph in a Sunday supplement. The first invitation to visit the house of an old Southern family. These are landmarks. But the years go so fast. He is so busy, the number of servants multiplies, the number of press photographs, the number of invitations. He refuses more invitations than he accepts. He only accepts those that may open avenues to business.

He does not ask himself: "Shall I enjoy this?" but, "Will this be of any use to me?" It is because he fancied that an important amalgamation was imminent that he decided to dine with Montague.

§

He found himself placed next a young, bright-eyed, very attractive girl. The moment they were seated she turned eagerly to him.

"I can't tell you, Mr. Arkwright," she said, "how excited I am to meet you. I've heard so much about you. I especially asked to be put next you. I told Montague that I wouldn't come unless I was."

She spoke in a quick, breathless voice. She was certainly nervous. Arkwright glanced at her card, Lucy Vanguard. He knew the name. An old Southern family. By no means a rich one.

"I've heard so much about you, but always from other people. I wanted to hear about you from yourself."

She asked him question after question; about his home, his beginning, his ambitions.

"You mustn't think I'm being tiresome," she said. "But I'm so weary of meeting always the same people, people who've been born something and have done nothing. It's such a relief to meet some one like yourself."

Her eyes were bright and her lips were parted as she listened. No one had ever looked at him like that, had listened to him like that. Not since the days when he had carried the recital of his ambitions to a wooden bungalow; the quarter of a century ago.

That evening when he returns to his large and silent house he sits for a long while pensive. He is forty-seven. He is alone in life. His parents are dead, his brothers settled on farms he has bought for them. It would be good to have life sweetened by bright eyes and bright smiles, and by attentive ears. If he does not marry soon, it will be too late.

§

It was the first time that he had wooed a woman. Women had scarcely existed in his life. He had had no time for them. The courtship, the machinery of courtship, the small gifts, the attentions, the little parties, the half-said hints, were more exciting than any business deal that he had ever put across. It was in its way rather like a business deal. And its excitement, as the excitement of business, was soothed by the certainty of ultimate success. She was dazzled by his success, her inexperience

reassured by his experience. He represented power for her and certainty; a life built upon sure foundations. A force to which she could confide herself.

Sometimes Arkwright wondered how much of himself went into this partnership. In the same way that his moustache and beard were a mask behind which he transacted business, might not his success, his power and his position be a mask behind which he sent flowers and spoke soft words? Might not Lucy Vanguard be seeing no more of him than his mask, in the same way that his colleagues in commerce did?

The thought did not worry him. He was too excited by his courtship. He had never known a fuller moment than when she turned to him, her eyes bright and a little misted:

"You're so marvellous, so powerful, so big. You're everything. I'm nothing. But if you want me, really want me, why, yes, yes, yes!"

§

They took a house, a large house, on the edge of the park. He sold all his old furniture and bought new.

"Everything must be new for a new life," he said.

The new life began. They gave dinner parties and went to theatres, there were dances and entertainments from Lucy's friends. Arkwright was very proud as he walked into strange houses at the side of this exquisite creature that was his wife. Very proud and very happy when her bright eyes would flash friendlily to him across a ballroom or dinner table.

He was prouder and happier still when he learnt that he was to be a father. No care was too great for him to expend during the weeks when Lucy lay on a sofa pale and tired, weary for relief. He anticipated her every wish. When their son was born his happiness and pride knew no limits.

"And now," said Lucy, "I'll start enjoying myself. I'm due for a little fun."

She was twenty-four. She was sure of herself, self-vindicated as a wife and mother. Her looks and her health had returned to her. For the first time in her life she had money to spend freely. There were so many things to buy.

She was like a captive balloon that has been released. Dance followed dance, party followed party. There were night clubs and cabarets and rushed visits to Newport and Long Island. Arkwright was over fifty. The pace became too swift. By midnight he was exhausted. A strained look came into his eyes.

"Don't bother to stay up, darling, if you're tired," his wife said. "I'll find some one to see me home."

After late nights Lucy wanted to sleep on into the morning, so that she should be fresh for the day's adventures. One morning she was disturbed by Arkwright's getting up.

"Don't you think," she said that evening, "that it would be better if we had separate rooms? I never got to sleep again. I've felt like death all day. I expect I disturb you, too, coming back late like that."

One day she receives an invitation for a weekend party outside Memphis. She claps her hands. "That'll be

lovely!" she says. "All the people that I like most'll be there. We'll take the train Thursday night."

"But I've got a board meeting on Friday afternoon."

"Can't you cancel it?"

"I'm afraid not."

A peeved, unhappy look comes into her face. "And I'd so wanted to go," she says.

At all costs, feels Arkwright, that peeved look must be removed.

"There's no reason," he said, "why *you* shouldn't go down on Thursday. I'll come on Friday."

Her face brightens. "You're sure you don't mind?"

"Of course not."

"I'll tell them you'll be in time for lunch Saturday."

But the board meeting is more complicated than Arkwright has expected. A lunch on Saturday is necessary to clear it up. The lunch lingers. By the time it is over the weekend visit has become impracticable.

A fortnight later there arrives a mid-week invitation. Lucy looks at it pensively.

"I suppose you couldn't manage it?" she said. "I'ld rather like to go."

In a little while it is generally realised among their friends that one can invite the Arkwrights separately.

Lucy leads her own life. She has her own friends, her own interests.

"My husband is so busy," she explains. "He has to be up early, and late nights tire him."

She sees extremely little of her husband. He has left the house by the time she wakes. When he returns she is either at a tea or changing for the evening. When they

go out together to dine, they are set at the opposite ends of the table. Invariably they return separately. He has not the time to join her on her shopping expeditions to New York. They are excellent friends. They never quarrel. She is careful with her bills. She sees that the house is well run. When he has business friends to be entertained she is a thoughtful and gracious hostess. She is fond of him and she respects him. "You make me terribly happy," she said once. "You give me everything I've ever dreamed of wanting." His wealth, his experience, his position are the background against which she makes her attack on life. They make all things possible for her. In return she makes the routine of his life easy for him. She takes the hackwork of living off his shoulders.

§

He needed it. He felt very tired sometimes. Never had he worked harder or rather, never had his work seemed to cost him so much effort. He was half way to sixty. His constitution was not strong. There was a limit to the strain that could be imposed on it. For forty years he had driven himself unsparingly. Sometimes he wondered how much he had got out of it. All his life he had been denying himself. In youth he had none of the fun that came the way of most young men. He had not had time for it. His middle years had been drudgery. Life seemed no different now that he was approaching the last climacteric. Had he really got more out of life than his brothers had? What would have happened, he sometimes asked himself, had he gone to the Georgia

grocery, had he lingered there, begetting children in that soft climate, under those soft skies?

§

He is pondering these things one evening as he is being driven back from his office. There is a block in the traffic. As he leans forward to see what is causing it, his eye is caught by a brightly lit shop window. It is filled with toys. In the centre is a vast model railway, and over a distance of fifty years there comes back to him the picture of a small boy standing beside his chauffeur father gazing longingly at that same window.

He presses the bell at his side, speaks into the tube, and the car draws up beside the pavement.

He goes into the shop.

"I want to have a look at that model train," he says.

It is a noble train. It is two feet long. It has ten wheels. It is driven by an electric dynamo. It costs two hundred dollars. He smiles to himself as he draws the notes from his pocket. To think that five minutes back he should have been wondering whether those years of work were worth it. Of course they are worth it, when you can afford to buy your son a toy like this.

§

He returns to find the small annexe of the hall filled with hats and coats.

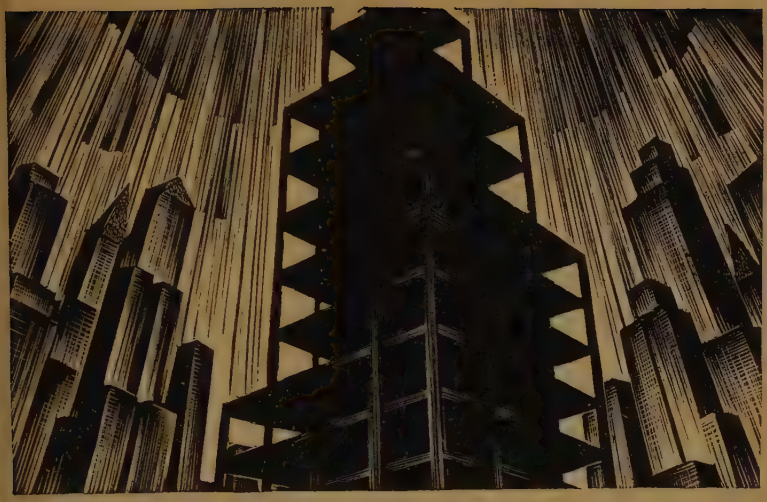
"Mrs. Arkwright has some friends for tea," the butler tells him.

He goes straight upstairs to the large airy nursery, with its fire burning brightly in the grate, its wallpaper decorated with the heroes and heroines of fairy folk lore, its toy-filled cupboards, its rocking-horse, its linoleum-covered floor set out with soldiers.

"Look, Tommy, what I've brought you."

Proudly and eagerly he unpacks the parcel, arranges on the floor the metal rails, the signal boxes, the tunnels, the toy station; arranges the points, sets the lead porters and passengers on to the platforms, connects the dynamo, sets the train in motion. Seated on the floor he watches the train thundering round the nursery, watches it with such absorption that he does not realise that no answer is coming to his comments. It is not till a question proffered twice has remained unanswered that he lifts his head to see that Tommy is no longer watching the train's gyrations. Tommy has walked over to the open window, he is looking out of it on to the broad square. By the pavement before the house a couple of cars are drawn. Their chauffeurs are standing side by side; they wear bright uniforms, their buttons shine, they remind Arkwright of his father. They are laughing and chattering. One of them pretends to hit at the other. The other ducks. A girl shouts at them from across the road. Enviously the small boy looks down on them.

"I think, Daddy, when I grow up," he says, "I'ld like to be a chauffeur. They have such fun."



NEW YORK

XIII

THERE are two ways in which an English author can see New York. He can see it as New Yorkers see it, as he himself sees London, as a place containing seven million people and seventy million interests in which he can lead a personal and varied life, or he can see it as a strange ransomed city laid startlingly and miraculously at his feet. To most English writers is granted once the experience of seeing it from that latter angle. For me it came in the spring of 1930 and was heralded by a cable that I found waiting for me at Mombasa. "Get twenty photographs of yourself taken in exotic settings. Love. John Farrar."

§

Mombasa is about a three weeks journey from Marseilles. I had taken the trip for the trip's sake simply. I

was very tired. During the fourteen previous months I had made a pretty thorough tour of the West Indies. I had written a travel book, a novel, a number of short stories and against time a serial for a magazine. I had needed badly the rest and isolation that nothing can give as completely as does a long sea voyage. As I sat on the balcony of Basso's restaurant, looking towards the cluster of narrow streets that provide a shelter for more varied types of crime than any other acre of the world's surface, I felt utterly devitalized and drained. I could not imagine myself ever wanting to write anything, ever wanting to be adventurous again. To the majority a voyage through Suez to East Africa would appear in terms of glamour. On the evening that I left London, Dorice Fordred gave a farewell cocktail for me, and I had certainly felt rather grand when I replied to the people who asked me where I was going, "Oh, well, I'm starting with Zanzibar." But in very truth, as I drove to the Messageries Maritimes offices to take up my ticket, as I helped the steward arrange the luggage in my cabin, as I saw from the decks of the *Aviator Garros* the long spur of rock obscure the houses of the Vieux port, I felt more than anything like a patient entering a nursing home.

I took the trip as a rest cure simply, relaxing unconditionally to the easy routine of a French ship's life; walking for an hour or so every morning before the heat of the day had grown oppressive, lolling back in a deck chair afterwards, a book upon my knee, my eyes lifting constantly from the printed page to gaze over the yellow sands across which the children of Israel had sought for Canaan, talking desultorily with French colonials, of those

other stations to which France sends her sons, Saigon, Port Vila, Papeete, Pointe-à-Pitre, accompanying the admirable and varied food with a litre of adequate Bordeaux, siestaing the afternoon away, chatting with the barman before dinner over a Creole punch; later when the air was cool, and the phosphorus was washing against the ship's side in long silvered ripples, there would be dancing on the deck, and in the smoking room, bridge of a kind, when the band had packed away its instruments.

Between Mombasa and Marseilles there are only two ports of call; Port Said, and the sunbaked gateway to Abyssinia. In the harbour before Djibouti lies the flame-gutted carcass of the *Fontainebleau*. I had booked a passage for the voyage on which she had caught fire. At the last moment I postponed my sailing so as to watch the first 1926 test match at Trent Bridge. I went there with Arnold and Clifford Bax and A. D. Peters. We put ourselves to a good deal of expense and trouble to get seats. On Friday we motored to Nottingham through seven hours of incessant rain. During the Saturday we watched the scoring of thirty-two runs in three-quarters of an hour. Then for the remainder of the day saw a midland drizzle reduce the wicket to a quagmire. Sunday was relatively fine. We sat about the hotel telling ourselves that at any rate we would have two days' cricket. On Monday we woke to the sight of grey skies and the sound of rain. My memories of that long seven hours' drive back to London is of the monotonous click of the window drier; a couple of punctures; a yokel who sat reading in the hedge, too wet to work and too listless to go home, and a condition of frayed nerves that resulted in the only

"words" that I have ever had with Peters. As we sat that evening at dinner in the Isola Bella, we agreed that we had never in our lives wasted four days more completely.

I was grateful to their waste however three weeks later when I saw the wreck of the *Fontainebleau*, heeled over in the silt. No lives were lost in the accident, but I can imagine no sorrier place than Djibouti to be stranded in with half one's baggage. It is a bleak spot. At the landing stage you are met by "fiacres" so decrepit that it must have been in the days of de Maupassant that they rattled over the cobblestones of Paris. The town is half a mile or so from the quay. It is flat and hot, and the glare from the yellow buildings dazzles you. The white section of the town consist of two or three hotels, a couple of stores, a bank, some government buildings and a few bungalows. Its two dusty streets bear the unmistakeable stamp of imported France that you will find equally in Saigon, Papeete and the Vieux Carré of New Orleans. There are bare-floored restaurants, with large sideboards, tablecloths, carafes of water, pointed knives, bottles of Algerian wine and the fifteen-franc table d'hôte from which the minor officials take their meals en pension. In the evening the important men of the town will sit on the verandah over their *fines*, silent beside the wives and daughters who echo in skirt and blouse the fashion plates of Parisian elegance. It is a lifeless spot. There is no bathing; no golf; as far as I could see, no tennis. Cinema performances are infrequent. The gramophone shop provides the sole equivalent for entertainment. The tourist for want of anything else to do, orders a bock he does

not need, and which flies befoul before he has time to drink, and resists as best he may the importunities of the street vendors who cluster round him with fans, necklaces, knives, scent bottles and indecent photographs.

A cabman will probably persuade him to pay a visit to the camels. He will be driven through a huddled succession of low, one-storied, mud-built cabins to an arid camp, an affair of stench and heat and wretched hovels, to which needy and ill-favoured camels bear their merchandise in the same fashion as did their progenitors twenty-five centuries ago. The five hours of one's anchorage pass slowly. On a second visit one decides to remain upon the ship, bribe natives to dive from the upper deck for francs, bargain with the silk dealers, and listen to the pleadings of small boys who will tell you that they have no father, mother, sister, brother, and who, if you are unmoved by that, will proceed to sing you "Tipperary." I can only guess how I should have spent the sojourn that was enforced there upon the passengers of the *Fontainebleau*.

§

A journey down the East Coast of Africa is only of amusement to those who love travel and the sea. Perhaps even I who love both well, might have found it tedious at any other time. As it was I landed at Mombasa, happy and refreshed with the zest for work and living plentifully restored; so that I could enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of John Farrar's cablegram. He wanted the photographs, I presumed, as publicity for my travelogue "Hot Countries" which was in the press, so I hired an

Indian photographer, filled a Ford car with clothes and spent a morning driving round the island. The result of three hours' industry could have illustrated "a World-tour" booklet. I was photographed in shorts, a topee and bare sleeves seated beneath a palm tree; in a sarong picking bananas; in ducks sauntering towards the club; in a towel sunning myself upon the beach. I was photographed playing cards with Arabs in a café, bargaining with an Indian for a shawl, playing with a nigger baby in front of a mud cabin, displaying professional interest in a camel's hump. I even let down the white man's prestige by persuading a comely mulattress to sit beside me in a rickshaw. Feeling that I had done my duty, I took the afternoon train to Nairobi.

I did not stay there long. Nairobi, with its dust and emptiness, its two or three large hotels, its couple of main streets, its occasional public building, its improvised, unfinished atmosphere, with its planters down for a few days of trade and pleasure, its big-game hunters preparing to go out upon safari with their tents and cameras and rifles, and its hunters proudly returning with their souvenirs, was like a station through which trains were passing. It had an unlived-in air. And the planters who strolled into the hotels in short sleeves, open throats, and muddied puttees seemed to be playing at pioneers. There was too much of the big he-man from the hills about them. The real pioneer invariably dresses himself up to the nines when he comes to town. I was glad to be back in the familiar coast-town atmosphere of Mombasa, with its heat, its luxuriant vegetation, its immemorial bazaars, the friendliness of its clubs; its heavy drinking.

For reasons of curiosity and economy I had booked my return passage to Europe steerage third. On my last morning in Mombasa I bought a dozen silk shirts so that, should my courage fail me at the end, I should not have enough money to finance my cowardice. I had an idea that however uncomfortable the journey might be, the experience was one that I should not miss. For I had not then quite rid myself of the Dostoieffsky tradition in which I had been reared, that life only grew real when it grew raw. Contemporary criticism in the period when I first studied it, authoritatively condemned as trivial and unreal any novel that opened with a well-bred, well-dressed young man walking down Pall Mall in a silk hat, and acclaimed as "keen with the lifeblood of humanity" the story that opened in a Stepney tenement. It has taken me a decade and a half to learn that a man who has been educated at Winchester and New College, who has read widely and travelled widely, who has mixed in various countries with the men and women who direct the fortunes of those countries, can have as interesting a personality as a Thames-side thug.

My fellow passengers on the *Bernadine-de-St. Pierre* were as varied a crowd as one could wish. There were French sergeants from Madagascar, quarter-caste officials from Reunion; coloured corporals on their way to Guadeloupe. Together with a vast assortment of Goans, Mohammedans, Hindoos. To many of them the ordinary ship's food was prohibited by the tenets of their particular faiths. And at all hours of the day in some portion of the deck, a couple of solitary figures, oddly garbed, would be eating out of a bowl such strange meats as their beliefs permitted.

They were simple, cosy people. The *Bernadine-de-St. Pierre* is a new and extremely comfortable ship. Its third-class accommodation is as good as second-class on the majority of steamers. I had a pleasant journey, sitting about in a deck chair, reading, playing a gramophone, exchanging ship's gossip with the barman. By travelling third, I saved about thirty pounds; but three weeks' association with the raw stuff of humanity taught me less about life than a single civilised dinner party in London. I arrived at Marseilles, eager for anything that life might have to offer.

§

What it did have to offer was an immediate journey to New York. In the Messageries offices a long letter from John Farrar was waiting to explain his demand for twenty exotic photographs. My travel book, he told me, was a Literary Guild selection. The publication date had been postponed till the end of April. His publicity campaign was dependent on my personal appearance. Would I not come over at once bringing with me for window display, such tomahawks, clubs, and hula skirts as I might have collected in my wanderings.

I did not then, I do not now, place much faith in the book sales value of personal publicity. For actresses, and politicians, for those who depend for success upon the exploitation of their personalities, press photographs and paragraphs to the effect that Mr. So and So was one of the guests at Lady This and That's dinner party, are, no doubt, of value. But the writer relies not on his personality but on what he writes. A book is bought for its intrinsic in-

terest, not for its author's social prominence. Of the writers whose names appear in the gossip columns, quite as many sell two thousand as sell twenty thousand copies. I think that a writer should concern himself with the writing of his books and leave the advertising of them to his publisher. I did not believe that my presence in New York would increase the sales of "Hot Countries" by one per cent, but I did think that I could have a very jolly month playing around with John Farrar, the Rineharts and Carl Brandt. And so from the balcony of Basso's restaurant I wrote off that it was a grand idea and that other things being equal I certainly would come. A qualification which I felt that John knew me well enough to understand.

That afternoon I took a slow train along the coast to Villefranche. A waxing moon was high above the little harbour, in the garden café was a warm welcome waiting me. A day or two later Evelyn Waugh came across to join me. It was the first time we had really seen anything of each other for close upon two years. We went on expeditions along the coast, lost money in the Baccarat room at Nice, ate *bouillabaise* at the Cabanon and in the intervals of all that did a little work. For a week or so we loitered happily, then a cable from New York arrived that proved quite conclusively that John Farrar had understood my letter. "Have booked passage for you—*Bremen* leaving Southampton April 24."

The next month was the kind of thing that I, who had already spent quite a little time one way and another in the United States, had felt inclined to disbelieve when other writers had told me about their New York experi-

ences. I just had not believed it possible that a grown-up and reasonably self-detached person could be persuaded for a whole month into the belief that the sole event of any importance in New York City was his own presence there. It is, however. From the moment I stepped off the *Bremen*, on which I had had reserved for me a walnut-lined bridal suite of embarrassing munificence, I was not allowed to suppose that anything mattered to any one except what I thought and wished. I was transported from Brooklyn to the Chatham and installed in a large suite. I was handed a typewritten sheet of my engagements. I was to be interviewed here, I was to speak on the radio there. This party and the other had been arranged. For three weeks the telephone bell rattled. I had scarcely a spare hour. It was a succession of lunches, of teas (at which everything seemed to be drunk but tea); of dinners; of roundings of the night clubs. I made a number of new friends, I had a grand time, and perhaps I sold seventy-five extra copies of "Hot Countries." In the life of most English writers some such experience as that comes once. It is, I rather fancy, in the light of such an experience that a great many of the descriptions of New York are written, and such an experience is as much typical of New York as is boat-day in Papeete of the Pacific Ocean.

§

Though what is typical of New York is difficult to say. To most New Yorkers the life that I am leading now in an apartment building at the junction of Lexington and Thirty-sixth would probably seem as foreign as my inter-

viewed existence at the Chatham. For I suppose that it is the chief charm of a great city that there is nothing typical of it; that it is so vast that one can be one's self there; that one can arrange life as one chooses. I came to New York last autumn to work and to see my friends. And in spite of all that is said of New York's nerve-wearing speed and noise, I have not known another place where can be found so easily, leisure in which to work and quiet in which to think, combined with an inexhaustible variety of entertainment.

§

"If I were you," said Ida Wylie when I told her that I was planning to settle into a furnished apartment for four months, "if I were you, I should just make a picnic life of it."

I followed her advice. Prohibition and steam-heat have made a different standard of comfort in America. There are warmth, elevators, and bathrooms that it is joy to dawdle in. But there are few open fires to sit before and no brandy to sit over. A certain cosiness is consequently lacking. Moreover, with servants coming all the way from Harlem and charging fifty cents an hour when they arrive, it is very much simpler for the moderately incomed bachelor to go out for meals. With its cafeterias, soda fountains, and delicatessen shops, America is perfectly equipped for a picnic life.

It is a very jolly life.

In London I can imagine nothing more grim than going out to an A.B.C. for breakfast. But here it is rather fun walking to a pharmacy two blocks away, perching one-

self on a high stool beside a row of office girls on their way to shops and offices and drinking one's morning coffee at a bar. One gets a sense of reality to begin the day with. Before Mary arrives from Harlem, I have been at work an hour. Mary is from St. Kitts, and a Britisher, she proudly told me. She has the high-pitched West Indian cackle of a laugh that Eldred Curwen, out of his memories of Martinique, startlingly imitates in his Antibes villa. She screamed with delight when I asked her what her husband did. At first, I thought she was telling me he was a coal heaver, but it was not that. "He's under de cold earth," she said. "Hab you got a job for him?" With her I have none of the long discussions about meals that make my mornings in Cheyne Place pass so pleasantly and swiftly. Every quarter of an hour of her conversation costs me twelve cents fifty. I encourage her to make the bed, scour the apartment and prepare a salad for my lunch with all the despatch of which her aged limbs are capable.

There are very few interruptions to my day. New York may contain as many idle people as London does. But I have not met them. Nobody rings me up to tell me about a headache. Such necessary interruptions as may come can be dealt with easily. After widespread London, everything seems very close together. The Club where I play squash racquets every morning is four blocks away. Carl Brandt's office is on Fortieth Street. John Farrar's on Forty-first. Nearly any one I might want to see before half-past four is within ten minutes' walk of me. I have usually got through two thousand words

before the Chanin Building has begun to hang high over Lexington its patches of oblong light.

Then it is time for the teas at which everything but tea is drunk. And if one has nothing planned for the evening as likely as not one will find oneself linked up with some party or other before the tea is through. No doubt for the person whose home is New York, the manipulation of acquaintances and friends is as complicated a business as it is in London; with engagement diaries black with dates a fortnight off. But possibly because of a certain improvised quality in New York life, but in a greater degree, I think, because of the American's great readiness to hospitality, the foreigner, with a few real friends and a number of acquaintances, does not need to plan his amusement far ahead. I know that I, who have never found it possible to get any solid work done in London, should never have believed it possible that in a big city one could get through so much work at a time when one was having so much fun. Nor that leading a town life one could feel so astonishingly well.

§

I came over on the *Grasse*, one of the pleasantest of the French line's smaller steamers. It was a cabin boat. Its docking was unattended by the rush of reporters that swarms the gang-plank of the *Berengaria*, the *Europa* and the *Ile de France*. There was no news-story in connection with my visit, and I had been in New York a week before a voice over the telephone asked when I would be

free for an interview. It was a woman's voice, so I guessed what the subject of the interview would be.

"Now, do you, Mr. Waugh, like American women?"

It is the kind of question to which you just can't give an answer, or at any rate the kind of answer that is any use to an interviewer. Obviously one takes care not to see often, if ever twice, the people that one doesn't like, with the result that wherever one is, the men and women in whose company one lives, are people of whom one's fond. So the answer to the interviewer's question must be, "The ones I see I like," which means just nothing. From the blank look that came into her face when I gave her that answer I had a feeling that the interview was not going to go too well.

"Well, suppose, Mr. Waugh, that you were going to write a story about an Englishman falling in love with a New York girl. What kind of a story would you write?"

That was another pretty hopeless question. If I had had an idea for a short story I should not have been discussing it in my apartment with an interviewer, but at 572 Madison with Charlie Towne in the hope that *Harper's Bazar* would pay me some money for it. I gave the best answer that I could. I quite honestly did my best. But the interviewed is in the hands of the interviewer. At the end of half an hour we looked at each other helplessly and said simultaneously, "I'm very sorry." As far as I know the interview never found its way into print.

But that evening, as I sat at the Metropolitan, thinking through the music into that mood of reverie which is for the unmusical the main charm of music, I began to wonder how one would write a story about an Englishman

and a New York girl, if locality was to be the story's point; if the story were to explain what are the characteristics that make the New York girl different from a girl that is born in London, San Francisco or Berlin.

It is easy enough to generalise about American women. It is easy enough to generalise about the New York woman. The open air life of Sydney gives to its women a glow and health that no other city I have visited can match. But most travellers will admit that in general smartness and attraction the New York woman has no equal. It would be easy enough on those lines to etch a series of word pictures of New York women, as they carry with them in offices, in subways, in cafeterias, in the streets, in dance clubs, their particular vividness and charm. That, one could do. But when I thought away from generalisations to specific instances, asking myself how any of the four or five New York girls that I knew well could be taken as typifying anything except themselves, I began to wonder whether the writing of any such story would be possible; whether the only way to write a New York love story would not be to make New York itself the central character, showing how the conditions of New York effect, regulate and control the course of love.

§

For one does not fall in love in a city in the same way that one does upon a liner or on Eden Rock. The same flower will grow differently in different soils. And to a certain extent I have tried to show in this book, not how the Martinique woman is different from the Malay,

nor the English woman from the American, but how in different settings, the same emotion will flower differently. In small communities whose life moves slowly, love comes imperceptibly into its possession. In the big cities as often as not the process is reversed. Passion comes first and the other things, if they can, come after. Love is restless and improvident. It has to be pigeonholed into odd moments. You never know whether it is yours or not.

In "Three Score and Ten" I wrote the story of a London idyll. It was in the main autobiographical. She was twenty-five, I two years younger, and it was the kind of thing, pagan and unreflecting, of which only extreme youth is capable.

She was born in Durban and had come over to do war work with the South African contingent. She had become engaged to an English gunner. A week before her marriage the third battle of Ypres began. She never, I think, got over it. "I realised, of course," she told me once, "that he might get killed, and sometimes I used to try and find things I didn't like about him, so that if he never came back I could remember them, and say, 'Perhaps he wasn't so nice after all; perhaps it wouldn't have turned out so well.' I used to try so hard to find something that wasn't nice about him. I never could."

I don't know what her life was like before her fiancé's death. But I fancy an intense vitality must always have demanded noise and colour. It did during the year I knew her.

The first time I visited her flat, noticing that the door of the drawing room was ajar, I got up to close it.

"No, leave it open," she said. "The idiots who put in

the telephone, ran the wire under, instead of through, the woodwork; and when the door closes on it, it makes a singing noise."

"Why don't you cut away a shaving of wood?" I asked. "Then the door wouldn't press on it, and there'ld be no noise."

"That's an idea," she said.

But she never made the alteration. In a way that refusal to be bothered over a door that wouldn't shut, was symbolic of her whole life. A flat to her was never a place where you sat quietly and talked to a friend or read; it was a place you dashed through, where you kept your clothes, had baths, played gramophones, shook cocktails, danced to fox-trots; where you were on the move always from one room to another. It was a careless, jolly, ragamuffin life.

And they were careless, jolly, ragamuffin things we did together. We used to start on bus excursions from the Plough at Clapham. To dance at Elsa Lanchester's cabaret in Charlotte Street; to drink good brandy at the Café Royal, and sip at Zabaglioni at the Isola Bella. I would help her choose frocks at Eve Valere's, and she would lie on her stomach on the floor disarranging galley proofs. We were very happy.

It is curious what remains to one of a love affair. Once as she was sprawled reading before the fire, she tapped her finger on the page. "I don't like the phrase 'sort of'; 'kind of' is better English."

I have never begun to write the phrase since, without recalling in every detail the picture of that afternoon. Nor have I ever used a station telephone, without remem-

bering how often during that long summer I would ring her up on my way back from a day's cricket; nor the excitement, when the operator's "three pennies, please" told me that she was at home.

We rarely quarrelled; on the afternoon of one of our few quarrels, with the quarrel still only half made up, she glanced at the clock, and gave a start. "Heavens," she said, "I'm dining the other side of London. I must get changed. Tell me where you'll be between half-past nine and ten. I'll try and phone you." I did not know even by name the people she was dining with, and I considered the curious pigeonholing of city life, by which one can walk in five minutes out of the trouble of one's private life into a world where it has assumed that one has no troubles. By the time she rang me up we both wondered what we had quarrelled over. I have remembered that evening since when I have seen some woman moody and depressed at dinner, who has asked afterwards to telephone, returning happy and bright-eyed, to laugh, be gay and to leave the party early.

For a spring, a summer, and an autumn, it ran its course. In late November she went back to Durban.

In retrospect, those eight months seem as self-contained as the love story within a novel. It is with surprise now that in the recalling of a certain meeting, the reading of a certain book, a week-end house party, I say to myself, "That was in 1922, in July somewhere," and realise that in fact those eight months were not self-contained at all; that through them the main current of my life was following an independent course; that I was making friends, following a career, planning books; that for three quarters

of the time, probably, I was not thinking about her at all. She, too, during that time was seeing friends of whom I knew nothing; visiting houses I was a stranger to; writing to friends and relatives in South Africa, planning that life of hers which was established before she knew me, and has continued now I am part of it no longer.

§

It is this pigeonholing of one's various lives that renders difficult in a big city the concentration of one's entire faculties upon another person that makes for the fierce passions that from time to time flare up in the lives of small continuities. To love at all in a big city, one has to love a lot. It is so easy in the company of other people and in the midst of other interests to forget that you are in love, to lose the reality both of your happiness and unhappiness; to break the current of intertwining thoughts. A love story to be typical of New York would not so much have to show the impact on a foreign mentality of a girl who typifies the city's life, as describe the city itself that would direct his awareness of her.

In its way, it would probably be a conventional enough story. I think that every story is conventional that is true to life. There would be the conventional chance meeting in a friend's house; the start on the man's side, as there walks into the room, in a green dress, a girl in the early twenties, very slim, and slight and flowerlike; and the thought that comes to him, "That's some one terribly pretty. I must talk to her."

Her voice is low pitched and to an English ear difficult

to follow. They are discussing the theatre, and she tells him that no, she has never seen Hamlet acted. He smiles. "Now what do you think I was asking you?" he says.

"What I thought about John Barrymore."

"I was asking you if you didn't think one saw plays better from the balcony."

She smiles at that and her smile is friendly.

"I suppose that means that you've heard as much of my conversation as I've heard of yours."

"Haven't you heard much of mine?"

"About one sentence in every four."

And they laugh together, and the laugh is a bond between them. And they talk easily and lightly as though they had been friends years, conscious of kinship and attraction. Then a hostess separates them. "She's nice," he thinks, "and sweet and real." He looks at her as she stands beside the man who has brought her to the party and a queer feeling of jealousy twitches him. What does he know about her after all.

That night back in his apartment, he looks her name up in the telephone book. The number is listed in her father's name, and the sight of those two entries, the home and the office number, symbolises all that side of her life he does not know; the background against which her childhood and girlhood have been passed. "I am only here for a few months," he thinks. "My home, my life, my interests are three thousand miles away. There's no point in entangling myself."

But next day when he is ringing up the hostess of the previous evening to arrange a day when she can come to tea with him, he adds without knowing that he is saying

it, "I wish you could bring along that nice girl who was wearing the green dress." There are several other people at his tea; he has to be mixing drinks and introducing people, and whenever he thinks, "Now I can go and talk to her," she seems to be very deep in conversation with some one else. But though he only has time to exchange a dozen remarks with her, he knows before he has spoken six of them that he does not care to what nor to what extent he may become entangled; knows it as she talks to him; knows it almost more so, when she is talking to others; and he sees how effortlessly she deploys a charm that is based on an utter absence of any pose.

But three days later when they dine for the first time alone together, all his old doubt returns. There she sits at his side, laughing and chatting. There is no constraint between them. But they are strangers, utterly, to one another. She is over twenty. It is hardly possible that any one so attractive as she is, can have reached that age without having been herself attracted. That poise of hers that he admires so is scarcely the property of unawakened girlhood. There must be other men in her life, men in love with her. Maybe with one of them she is herself in love. He does not know. There is no way of knowing. The things that one finds out so readily and easily from mutual friends of an acquaintance, he did not want to find out of her. He wants to know of her only what he learns of her from herself.

A townsman himself, he is acutely conscious of the difficulties that await him. In a big city it is as difficult to build up a deep relationship as it is easy to slip into a casual one, and with her he does not want anything but a deep relationship.

If only, he thinks, they could be together in the same setting, on some ship or in some country house party; if only for a few days. After he has driven her home and he is back again in his own apartment, he looks blankly at the calendar. It is six days before he will be seeing her again; six days during which they will be apart from one another, so occupied with other people and other interests that they will have no time to think more than at odd moments, of one another. She may be the finest and sweetest person he has ever met, but what chance does he stand of being in her life anything more than the bird of passage he is in her country's life.

Which is neither more nor less than a thousand and one other young men have thought in the course of the world's history.

It would be a conventional enough love story in its opening. It was a conventional story when the sons of Priam rode their chariots round the wide walls of Troy. Such an episode might as well be set in Berlin or Paris or London, as New York. It would be only a New York story in the fact that it did actually happen there, that the skyscrapers and the cafeterias, and the long, straight streets composed its setting; that the setting became so much a part of it, that it would be in terms of New York he would remember it; that he would never be able to see a photograph of a skyscraper, or see flashed upon the screen the high outline of Manhattan, without reliving the crowded memories of those weeks. For that is what would happen, if his feeling went deep at all, and of the love that does not go deep, it is not worth while writing.

In early days he would console himself in despondent

hours with the belief that the precise conditions that made the conquest of a girl's heart hard for him, would make easy for him a shrugging away of his despondency; that as she would forget him with other people and in other interests, so would her hold on him loosen during the hours when he was away, and he would be able to say to himself as he saw the outline of her figure pass into the shadow of her apartment, "It'll be four days before I'll be seeing her. But there'll be an amusing party or two in that time; I'll play some squash, go to a theatre. There's the drug of work. Those ninety-six hours will pass quite quickly"; saying to himself that for half the time he will be too busy to worry about her much. Ninety times in a hundred it is like that. The capacity to forget does come. The meetings grow widelier spaced. And what might have been romance becomes a friendship.

But the hundredth time, the very conditions that he had imagined would help him to forget, create an indestructible chain about him. Little by little the city that is her setting becomes so identified with her in his imagination that at any hour of the day there will be some aspect of light or outline to remind him of her.

And were I to write a New York love story, I should tell how day by day the city would lay its spell upon him, so that he could not think of the city and her apart; so that there would be no escape anywhere from the low-pitched voice, the friendly smile, and the slim, slight figure; so that everywhere he went he would find some reminder of her; so that he would never see the green lights flashing down Park Avenue without remembering the eagerness with which he had driven so often north-

wards to her home, nor the depression with which he ha made the same journey at the evening's end, imploring th red lights to delay their passage, watching block by bloc the cruel haste of the mounting street numbers, the six ties gone, the seventies, the eighties; so that the illuminate clock of the Grand Central Terminal would remind hi how he had driven alone towards it, counting the hou that clock hand must traverse before he would be seein her again; so that he would be unable, no matter in wha company to go after a theatre into a sandwich bar with out remembering how after the opening night of "Topaze" they had gone to Reubens, and how they had found ther only one spare table; and that when they had sat togethe in the narrow alcove their elbows were too squashed fo them to eat; and that when he had sat opposite her, the were too far away from one another to hear anything the said; so that the incredible fairyland that is Fifty-ninth Street seen southwards from the West Side of Central Par would always recall the snowbound Christmas Eve when h had walked towards it, happy with the memory of a da spent with her, in his heart; so that he would see her acros lines of poetry and periods of prose; so that "Young Ma of Manhattan" would restate for him the heat and smok and dust, the coca-colas and hot-dogs of Madison Squar Garden and the cyclists' eternal pedalling.

In New York there would be no escape from her Whatever the outcome of his love, he would be unable eve again to see with unstirred blood the skyscrapers and th flashing lights and the long straight streets. New Yor would mean her to him. He would have fallen in lov with a whole city because it was her background.

EPILOGUE: VILLEFRANCHE-SUR-MER

XIV

With her hair piled high upon her forehead, her cheeks ull and her chin pointed, her head is shaped like a heart. The hair is black, drawn tightly behind the ears, falling n curls upon the shoulders. Her eyebrows are unplucked nd bright with brilliantine. Her eyelashes are long and curled. Her teeth are very small and white. Her mouth unrouged and smiling. As she leans across the zinc bar of the Garden Café against a background of many-coloured bottles, she has come to symbolise the whole spirit of Villefranche for me.

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I saw Villefranche first, seven years ago, from the window of a train. I was utterly unprepared for it. Sun-

bathing and the summer popularity of the Côte d'Azur had not begun. The Riviera meant to the English mind Cannes, Nice, Mentone, Monte Carlo, between the months of January and April. I had not been beyond Nice before. Tired by a sleepless night in a crowded train, and the heat of a Mediterranean day, I was looking with casual eyes through the carriage window when suddenly there it was below me; the little land-bound harbour, with the lean greyhound cruisers at anchor, the wide curved waterfront, the tall painted houses: yellow, pink and blue, high-storeyed, with green shutters and iron balconies. Very lovely and tranquil and self-contained it looked under the blue sky, under the amber sunlight, against the grey-brown background of its hills. In the same way that I fell in love with Tahiti at first sight, I fell in love with it. "I'll be back here soon," I thought. That was my first impression; and I have yet to be betrayed by first impressions of places as of people. To-day Villefranche lies closer to my heart than any place in the world except Tahiti.

In a way it is very like Tahiti.

Here, as in Tahiti, the sun shines from a blue sky ceaselessly. And here, as in Tahiti, you have a feeling of other-worldliness, of being no longer a part of the world whose days are recorded in the press. Five miles to the West of you are the bright shops, the shaded avenues, the long curve of the Promenade des Anglais: to the East ten miles or so away are the gaming tables, the opera house, the smart dressed and pyjama-ed swimming pools. Opposite, across the bay are the bright patterned villas of Cap Ferrat. From the terrace of the Welcome Bar you watch the blue train linking the various playgrounds of the Azure coast.

Monaco, Antibes, Juan. By night you watch the searchlights of innumerable cars sweeping the Corniche road. But here, sheltered and isolated by its hills, overlooked of fashion, life follows the same patient, careless course that it has followed for four centuries.

Here, as in the islands, the day starts with daylight.

As you walk along the quay to the shingled beach from which you bathe, you pass fishermen at work upon their nets. They smile friendlily at you as you go by. In the cobbled street by the hotel entrance baskets of fruit and fish will be set out, round which through the long morning housewives will haggle in the local patois. As you sit over your petit dejeuner of rolls and coffee and bursting purple figs at a round blue table, on a little terrace shaded by plane trees, looking out across the harbour, small children will loiter round you in the hope that you will have some fruit or a crust of bread left over. Early in the morning their parents give them a roll of bread and a cup of coffee and turn them out into the streets till evening. They are grubby, tattered, brown-skinned and happy. They have friendly, confiding eyes. All day long they tumble over one another down the narrow, climbing streets under the dark archways of the little town, chasing each other through the market, collecting in a rush round any such dramatic event as a dog fight or the arrival of a motor car from Nice. The whole town is their nursery.

Slowly the machinery of the town proceeds. Every one seems to be doing something; but casually; each in his own time. There are always people to sit round on the green seats before the terrace, gossiping. And in the evenings

here, as in Tahiti, dark-skinned, dark-eyed girls walk slowly in couples along the waterfront.

§

Most of my evenings in Villefranche I spend in the Garden Café. It is cool and dark, half way down the one main cobbled street. The houses are high and straight. At midday only and for an hour or so does the sun strike down that narrow corridor. More often than not electric light is burning in the little room where five marble-slabbed tables are set out, around the large horn-mouthed gramophone, and the zinc-covered bar across which Cecile with her high-piled black hair leans forward against her many-coloured background.

At any hour of the day you are pretty sure to find familiar faces there. There are innumerable bars in Villefranche. But each has its separate clientele; each has the quality of a club. In the morning from half past eleven to half past twelve there will be the local workmen: fishermen from the quay and masons from the upper town, drinking their aperitifs; their Pernots, and Amer Picons and Cinzanos. After lunch there will be a quieter clientele: pensionaires from the smaller hotels and commis voyageurs from Nice sipping their coffee and their *fine*. Towards evening the Chasseurs Alpins, their parades over, will be seating themselves at their high stools beside the bar, in their blue uniforms and yellow lanyards and putteed legs. On boat days there will be the dock labourers to empty their pockets of the sous that they have earned at the customs shed. As you stroll there after dinner

through the warm, lamplit town, the steps of the narrow, climbing streets will be crowded with gossiping groups and couples. The indefatigable children are still chasing each other under the vaulted arches of the Rue Obscure. In the dark stairways there are lovers loitering. From the open doors of the houses will come the sounds of music. There will be dancing in the Garden Café. It is about the one amusement that Cecile has. She is never tired of it. She will dance with her sister, Doleen, when there are no male partners for her. At a table in the corner her parents will be seated, with their glasses of red wine or perhaps a *panaché*, playing a kind of whist or a dice game called "Cochon" in which when you throw a six followed by a five and four you unblushingly scoop the pool. There is a tired look upon their faces. Every morning at two o'clock they start for Nice to collect the vegetables for the market. They get rarely three hours' sleep at night: and in the afternoon they are lucky if they can manage another three hours between the close of dejeuner and the evening hour of the aperitif. It is a household for which regular hours are impossible. They eat at odd hours, when they can. It is Cecile who is left to close up the bar, since it is Doleen who works early in the morning at the market; while Cecile, who rises later, cleans out the bar. There are only two hours of the twenty-four, between midnight and two o'clock when no member of the family is at work. Their life is a little like that of troops in a quiet section of the line. Nominally they are on duty all the time, but there is plenty of leisure for chatting. They never give the impression of doing anything in particular.

They are chained in respect of place, however. Particularly Cecile, who never works at the vegetable and fruit stalls in the market, whose entire life is bound by the four walls of her bar, who for days on end will never walk further than the fifty yards that separate her house from the Garden Café. She never swims; she has the excessive modesty that comes to those who live in a loose-tongued atmosphere and is shy of showing her body to the world. She is chaperoned to an extent that to English and Americans seems absurd. Though she is twenty years old she would accept not even an afternoon invitation into Nice from any one within the realms of enterprise. Once a week she will go to the coiffeur on the main Corniche road, and occasionally at four o'clock in the afternoon she will come down to the patisserie in front of the market place for a cup of chocolate.

I have a photo of her taken with a cine-kodak from my hotel bedroom. It was in April. The day was chill. She is wearing a dark blue coat and skirt. She walks quickly. Her hands are thrust into her coat pockets, her face is bent forward. As the film unrolls upon the screen you have the impression of some one hurrying through a hostile city. Which in a way is what she is. So much of her short life has been lived within the bar that outside of it she feels unsure of herself and her surroundings. She does not know how people will be taking her. She is among friends in the dark, cool room in the Rue de Poilu. There she is at her ease. There she can relax. She is in her own setting. She is like a Princess holding court. For every one who comes she has a smile. Those on whom she does not care to smile are few; and soon, with nothing

said, they are made to feel that she does not want them there. They do not return. Whoever come there, whether it is the fishermen from the quay, masons from the upper town, Chasseurs Alpins from the garrison, sailors upon leave or tourists such as myself from the hotel, we are all made to feel that we are her guests.

Like a hostess she moves from one table to another, talking now to this one, now to that; showing no preference. Occasionally she will offer an aperitif to a friend. Herself she will never drink; except when she is thirsty, a Vichy or a peppermint. When the fleet is in and hospitable clients grow insistent, she will have resource to a brown unlabelled bottle. "It is my own liqueur," she will explain, and charge them four francs for it. It is composed of water and brown sugar.

Class, in the Garden Café, does not exist. By making guests of her clients, Cecile has established a carefree atmosphere of equality. All are friends together there, sitting at the same tables, joining in the games of dice or cards, standing each other drinks. No greater deference is paid to the richer client. We are told that the French are mercenary, that their smiles are to be bought, that they are incapable of disinterested action. But that impression, I am very sure, is based on and is the direct result of our own misbehaviour in that section of Paris which is not France at all, but a Luna Park designed for English-speaking tourists. Than that Paris, and for the tourist it is very hard to find any other Paris—I know I never have—there is no mournfuller spot beneath the sun. But on their ships, in their colonies, in Normandy, in the Midi and in Provence, the French are a very different people. They

are pre-eminently practical. There are two tariffs in the Garden Café, for example. There is the tariff printed in English and fixed upon the wall, which is made by law obligatory for English-speaking tourists along the coast. And there is the tariff, its half exactly, for the French themselves. Which is logical. A country should extract profit from visitors who pay no taxes to the support of that country's administration. The French are economical. They know that life needs a setting; that old age should be protected; that if marriage is to be taken as a serious social contract, the "dot" is an essential clause in it. They also know that since the fine qualities of living are not for sale, it is needless to spend money recklessly. Their smiles are gracious, not in a spirit of calculation, but because the life of an intensely social race has been built upon traditions of good manners.

Casual people are wearied sometimes by such seemingly pointless formalities of French life as the perpetual hand-shaking with which one's morning on a French ship is occupied. But their weariness is very similar to that of the balladier or sonneteer who wishes periodically that he were writing in vers libre. One has gained too much in the sense of comely living from such formalities to resent the details of technique. There are rough characters in the Garden Café. Now and again there are rough words. I have seen wooden shutters abruptly fixed over the windows, when fists have been clenched in the narrow roadway. But life for the most part there is as ordered and well-bred as in any London club.

Sailors, the moment they arrive in the Garden Café, are conscious of that atmosphere. It is in the spring that the

fleet is in, and four years ago Villefranche was wild enough during those days. Every available bedroom was placed at the temporary disposal of the Nicoises belles. All day long the bars were filled with drunken sailors. It was a wild time, with knives drawn pretty often in the dark and narrow streets; so often indeed that the authorities have now decreed that during the months when the ships are at anchor, no unauthorised woman is to be allowed within the city limits. Villefranche has lost considerably in commerce. A jazz band may play all night in the cabanon but the waitresses and an occasional visitor from the Welcome constitute the entire dancing staff. It is to Nice now that sailors carry their full pocket books. In the Garden Café you will find only those who have spent their money and those who prefer quiet talks with Cecile and Doleen to the garish entertainments of the Rue d'Alger.

There are usually one or two such on every ship. Cecile's leather writing case is full of letters written to her by sailors. For the most part they are from English and Americans. They make quaint reading: those inarticulate expressions of quite real feeling. The fact that similar letters are being written to half a dozen other girls makes those feelings none the less genuine. At sea for the most part of their lives, they merge the various girls with whom in various ports they have talked quietly into one composite vision, the idea of home.

One such sailor I remember in particular.

I had gone up to the Garden Café after my petit dejeuner in search of a book that I had left there over night, to find an English sailor on his knees, with his slacks

rolled up, washing out the bar. He was young, broad-shouldered, ruddy-cheeked, and although his eyes were red-rimmed with lack of sleep, he was quite handsome. He looked up at me sheepishly.

"Hell of a night down there," he said. "Made me feel such a swine that I thought I must do something to make up, so I told these girls I'ld wash the bar out for them."

From then on he was a frequent visitor. Every evening that he was off duty he would spend in the Garden Café, drinking beer and dancing with Cecile and Doleen. It was clearly by Cecile that he was attracted. He could speak not one word of French. But his large eyes would follow her as she moved from table to table or stood mixing drinks behind the bar. It was an adoration so inarticulate that when he left it was with the mother that he left the presents, a photograph, a silk shawl, some coffee spoons, that must have cost him many weeks of pay.

From every port he wrote. To begin with he wrote in English. But when she told him that she had found a friend to translate his letters, he felt shy at having his intimate thoughts read by another eye. So he bought a dictionary in which he looked up each separate word. The result was curious. The word "Puit" ran its course down the unformed page. "Je etais triste," he wrote, "quand je gauche vous." "Louer me aimer vous," he proceeded. And my aid had to be requisitioned before any sense could be made out of "Je esperance vous vouloir jeu la gibier." [1] Only once did it occur to him that the same word might have two meanings. Then in the course of an exhortation

[1] This is really true.

to continued virtue he wrote "sommeil" in brackets after the word "dormir."

Most weeks there would come to the Garden Café some letter or other with a foreign postmark, some picture post-card from Ceylon, Los Angeles, Barbados.

It was the old Tahitian situation reproduced. Here was this quiet bar filled in part with the simple people of the place whose life was contained by the narrow semicircle of those few streets and houses that lay between the water-front and the Corniche road; in part by the sailors whose no less narrow life was bounded by the far coast line of familiar ports; and in part, too, by such birds of passage as myself, perched temporarily on this friendly and fragrant bough on our flight to further forests. Here, as in Tahiti, sophisticated and disenchanted Northerners were endeavouring to recover a simplicity they had lost only to find that the very people possessing that simplicity were trying to create in their withdrawn paradise the precise conditions they themselves had wearied of. "J'ai le cafarde"—through all Cecile's letters to me that phrase runs. She is dreaming of a wider stage; of Paris, the boulevards, the fashionable places in just the spirit that Nadia in her red and white pareo on a Moorean beach used to talk longingly to me of the cinemas and Ford cars and ice-cream parlours of Papeete. It was the same Tahitian problem.

§

As right through one's life, I fancy, one finds recurring the same moods and groups of moods. In the same way that certain numerical figures can be only resolved into a

given number of multiples; that a certain chemical composition can be fused into no more than a fixed number of amalgams, we, composed as we are out of heredity, out of a national and social setting, the product of our country and our age can only react to certain characters, certain climates, certain situations; and in certain ways. In this book in which I have tried to show how love flowers in different settings, I know very well that I have only seen what the limits of my nature have permitted. As certain magnets attract certain metals I have drawn to myself only those situations, those characteristics, those attitudes with which my nature is in tune. No more than a person in good health can picture the mental processes of an epileptic, can we enter imaginatively into the states of mind that our mental, physical and moral construction precludes us from experiencing.

To the Western mind any philosophy is antipathetic that appears to diminish the importance of the individual; that does not, for example, admit the survival of personality after death or that denies to the individual the right and choice of action. We refuse to believe in the "immutably foreseen," in a path mapped out for us by fate.

Particularly in love.

And yet however unheralded love's coming may be, to whatever extent at the time it may seem to reverse and overthrow every thought-out plan, is there a single profound experience that does not in retrospect take its place in a natural process of effect and cause?

In all big novels when the stage has once been set, you foresee, intuitively, the story's course. You do not know the exact details, the end you discern vaguely; but with

every page you read, the knowledge deepens that in this way only could this particular group of characters have developed.

With one's life it is in the same way, I think. Chance and coincidence are less powerful than is supposed. You will hear people say, "I am the kind of person to whom things like that will happen." Or, "I'm the kind of person to whom nothing happens." Or again, "things like that would never happen to anybody else." Which is another way of saying that we create our own accidents, that magnet-wise we draw to ourselves the experiences that will explain us to ourselves. Only that will happen to us that is in character.

I suppose that during the last five years I have been more subject than most people to the waves of hazard. And in actual fact the direction of those years was entirely reorientated by a chance cable in Tahiti. I have no idea how things would have gone had that cable arrived three hours later. But even so I do not believe that essentially it would have mattered had I returned as I had intended, direct through Panama to Europe, instead of staying on in Tahiti and later sailing north for San Francisco. There would have been some equivalent cycle of experience. For could I in 1926 have seen a picture of my life as it is to-day, I should have seen little in it to surprise me. The graph has been traced five years further, that is all.

The future is implicit in the present, is predictable in the same way that the simple equation of $x = y$ is predictable in a complicated stretch of brackets and plus and minus signs. If you set a form of boys to work upon an equation and halt them after five minutes' work the ap-

pearance of each sheet will be different. It depends on which brackets are opened first. The different appearances of that sum represent the potentialities of that sum. The ultimate equation is the same.

Intuitively we are conscious of the end to which we move. The dæmon that guided Socrates, the absolute certainty in the face of argument, as to what is at certain main turning points the right thing for us to do, is our instinctive foreknowledge of it. Our boyhood's reading is a form of prophecy. The passages we re-read, the lines of poetry we memorise, lines and passages whose implications we have not the experience to understand, are signposts to a day when we shall see those scenes staged for us in actuality, when those lines of poetry will throw their revealing searchlights on the heart of a situation in which we are the protagonists ourselves. Which is no more than a restatement after all of Goethe's warning that we should be careful what we desire in our youth since in middle age those desires will be compassed.

I do not believe that it was chance that led me to a reseeing, and from another angle, of the situation that four years earlier had faced me in Tahiti.

For it was from another angle that I was seeing it.

§

As I strolled each morning along the waterfront to bathe; as I sat over my coffee and rolls and figs on the shaded terrace; as I lay on the shingled beach watching the afternoon sun sink behind the grey-brown hills, the water reflecting its last colours on to the tall straight houses; as

at the close of an occasional afternoon in Nice, after certain fashionable hours of dust and noise, I have felt as I walked down the steep streets towards the harbour the slow healing tides of peace steal over me; as I chatted across my glass of rum with the fisher folk and Chasseurs Alpins; as after dinner in front of the hotel I sat over my coffee in looking out across the harbour to where the water was lapping against the moored boats in long, phosphorus-shot ripples, with the young men of the town in their white maillots and blue cotton trousers laughing at the water's edge, and the pretty dark-skinned, dark-haired girls sauntering beside them slowly arm-in-arm; as later I sat in the Garden Café playing at "Cochon" with Cecile's parents, exchanging the village gossip with Cecile, dancing with Cecile, watching Cecile as she moved, a gracious and graceful figure, from table to table; watching her as she rinsed the glasses; as she changed the records on the gramophone, creating an atmosphere of friendliness and home; as afterwards when the bar was closed I walked down the silent streets, and leaned out over the balcony of my bedroom window, with the humped shadow of Cap Ferrat veiled and poetic in the moonlight, with all quiet in the town below me, but on the Corniche road, symbols of unrest, the headlights of the high-powered cars still flashing restlessly; there came to me that old Tahitian longing to relax, to lose myself in the heart of this peace and beauty, to abandon the itch and fever of ambition, to accept an uncomplicated and friendly way of life.

And in the mornings as I watched while I wrote, the grubby children scampering down the narrow streets, gathering round my table to examine my manuscript, ac-

quisitive for my figs and bread, I had, as I had had in Tahiti, the certainty that here one could accept lightheartedly the responsibilities of parenthood, that here one could beget children in the foreknowledge that they would be happy. Through early years they would tumble, laughing and crying down the gutters of the narrow streets; they would earn an occasional sou by carrying the empty baskets from the market place into the upper town; by running errands for visitors; more often by the sheer effrontery of a quick smile and an outstretched hand and "Donnez-moi un sou!" When childhood passed there would be work for them with the fisher folk along the quay; and the years would pass, bringing them through boyhood, to the day when they would notice for the first time the dark eyes of a girl fixed lingeringly upon them. There would be an end then of the tattered shirt, the tousled hair, the unwashed hands. They would face their reflection in the glass and on Sundays there would be unstained trousers and sleek hair and a clean white maillot. Love would be pagan for them, and sweet. Later there would be their year of service, with the pride of uniform and the thrill of swaggering into a café, justified of life; with afterwards the settling down, the adoption of a trade; marriage with one or other of the dark-haired girls who saunter at evening along the waterfront; marriage and a long, slow drifting towards age. Or maybe, there would come, born to them from their father, a longing for wide horizons so that they would be lured from the little harbour; to wander on this or the other ship round the world's far places; to feel the crash and pause and sickening shiver of a ship when a large sea goes over it; to stand during

long night watches, under foreign stars; to be hurried in a rickshaw through the crowded Chinese quarter of Singapore; to see the palms bend over the sand on Malayan beaches; perhaps in their turn to forget ambition, to settle in some far city, Saigon or Pondicherry or Vera Cruz with some dark-eyed, dark-haired woman, remembering fitfully as though they belonged to some other life the tall, straight houses, and the dark archways and the green, flower-hung balconies.

In just such a way had I dreamed four years earlier in Tahiti as I watched from my hotel balcony the flower-haired, dark-eyed girls sauntering under the scarlet and gold avenue of the flamboyants, with happy, free-hearted children sprawled on the green grass banking the lagoon. On the surface it was a re-telling of the self-same story. But there was this of difference. In Tahiti I had had no experience to school me against the attempt to realise so foolish and so fond a dream.

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